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THE RISE AND THE FALL OF
THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND
(1973-1987)

by

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The cover photograph shows CPT guerrillas
at a base in southern Thailand in 1979

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In the context of Thailand's political and economic development over the last few years, it is hard to recall the deep concern there was over the strength of the country's communist insurgency in the 1960s and 1970s. Particularly after the student massacre of 6 October 1976, and the subsequent military coup which brought the country's brief democratic experiment to an end and forced many young activists, including the author of this paper, underground, there were many who thought it was only a matter of time before Thailand would become the next 'domino' following the rapid fall of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to communist forces in 1975. Instead, today the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) has all but disappeared and has ceased to be a significant threat to the government.

Much of the credit for the success in tackling the communist insurgency is usually given to the adoption by the Thai Government of a new counter-insurgency strategy, as set out in the Prime Minister's order number 66/23 (1980), which sought to tackle the insurgency by political rather than simply military means. While this study points to the importance of this shift in strategy, it also stresses the crucial importance of external factors, especially the leadership changes in China and the growing conflict within the communist bloc following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and the internal stresses and strains within the CPT which were intensified by the influx of student intellectuals after 1976. The study, originally submitted as a final year undergraduate special project at the University of Kent, is important because it is based on the author's own personal experience of the events of October 1976 and his years in the jungle with the CPT. It is thus able to offer important insights into the way these various external and internal factors, as well as Thai government policy and the country's own political and economic development, affected the CPT in the years after 1976.

In spite of the decline in the fortunes of the CPT, the author is clearly reluctant to completely write off the CPT as a force for change within Thai society. In contrast, my own view would be that the prospects for any recovery in the CPT's fortunes are now very dim. The party's search for an ideological breakthrough is made all the more difficult by the far-reaching economic and political changes sweeping most of the communist world. Within South-East Asia itself, the communist governments in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia now look to Thailand as a source of investment and assistance as they seek to open up and liberalise their economies. At the same time, Thailand's political and economic ties with China continue to grow.

However, the author is clearly correct when he says that many of the conditions that helped to fuel the insurgency remain. In particular, the country's recent rapid economic growth has largely by-passed the rural areas. Continued rural poverty, coupled with growing income and regional inequities, could yet threaten the country's burgeoning democratic process if left unchallenged. But rather than a recovery of the CPT, what seems more likely is a gradual strengthening of more radical, but legal, non-government organisations and pressure groups and the emergence of more radical political parties committed to reform which will, no doubt, draw both inspiration and personnel from among the student-intellectual activists who previously sought to achieve social change through their direct support for the communist movement. Only time will tell whether the remnants of the CPT will be able to play any real role in this process.

PREFACE

It is more than four years now since I left the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), and I cannot remember how many times friends, both Thai and British, urged me to write down something about my experiences during seven years in the jungle. I politely turned down their promptings, partly because I did not want to incriminate certain people whom I could not avoid mentioning in a written record, and partly because I did not have a sufficiently clear span of time to do so. This final year special project in Southeast Asian Studies has offered me the opportunity.

The aim of this particular project, then, is at least partly to review the history of the CPT over the last fifteen years (1973-1987) through the eyes of an individual who participated in the movement. Certainly, in common with other authors, whether academic or journalist, this study is intended to seek an explanation for the ups and downs of an illegal political party which used to be considered by many as 'the only organised opponent of the Thai ruling and exploiting classes', and 'the most influential pressure group of the past decade' (Ponpirom 1982:3). No one concerned with Thai politics can deny that the rise of armed revolution, led by the CPT, after the 6 October incident was spectacular - at the time, some went so far as to predict the movement's victory within three to five years - and the subsequent sudden setback of the party was no less dramatic.

However, the scope of a study such as this must be more limited. Rather than launch yet another full investigation into the CPT, I shall restrict myself to examining how the party has been viewed by social scientists; to summarising and comparing the existing material available to me; and to adding comments based on my own experiences which may either confirm or contradict the views of previous writers.

This study does not follow any particular theoretical framework, nor will it be another attempt to set up a new one of its own. By concentrating on the events of the last fifteen years, I aim to exploit to the full my personal knowledge. Some attention will be paid to the party's early history - before the period of my own participation - so as to provide an overall view of its origins and development. My hope is that, by giving my personal experiences and views, I might contribute something useful towards a greater understanding of the dynamics of one of the most active modern political organisations for social change within Thai society.

My main written sources are postgraduate dissertations on the CPT, supplemented by related literature. Conversations with my former 'comrades', especially a Politburo member and provincial committee member, are quoted extensively, along with my own personal knowledge and experiences. I am fully aware that putting so much information into this study has made it much longer than it should have been. However, I consider most of the information included indispensable to an understanding of the situation and to backing up my arguments.

Gawin Chutima
June 1988

INTRODUCTION

This study is written both in a critical spirit of doubt and with positive concern about the validity of previous studies on the history of the CPT. In the discussions that follow the author will try to examine the role of the CPT in Thai politics, concentrating mainly on the period of the last fifteen years (1973-1987). Presuppositions are challenged and some, but not all, of the conclusions in the literature concerned - which take in different views and different approaches - are confirmed. What remains true, and has to be essentially stressed, is the complexity of the social events in discussion. The author's strong belief is that no single theory or approach, however grand it is, can ever explain adequately the profound social phenomena within any society. The study once again confirms the need for more investigation on the CPT in order to improve on some of the over-simplified concepts and theories, and this ought to be done across various academic disciplines.

Though the emphasis in this study is on the course of events over the last fifteen years, one cannot avoid examining the origins of the CPT, which laid down the basis of its development over 45 years. The first chapter, therefore, focuses on the position of communism and communist movements in Thai society. Lacking the author's own first-hand information, this chapter is distinct from the other four chapters in the sense that it is rather a brief summary of what other scholars have investigated. Although their studies are far from giving a clear picture of events, they point in common to the fact that the particular origins of the CPT shaped, in one way or another, its future course.

In Thailand, though some ideas of socialism had existed in the emergence of peasant rebellions and intellectual dissent, they had no connection whatsoever with the communist movements which later developed to become the CPT. Historically, the Sakdina structure (roughly speaking, the Thai version of feudalism) remained intact after the end of Absolute Monarchy in 1932. At that time the bourgeois element of society was weak and predominantly Chinese. In fact, the remnants of the Sakdina class, the rising bureaucrats and military, and the new bourgeoisie, joined hands then to act as compradores for the western imperialist powers. Communist movements were not born among Thai people by virtue of economic and political development in Thailand as they ought to have been according to Marxist doctrine, but were instead brought in by foreigners, particularly the Chinese who acted on behalf of the Moscow-based Communist International (Comintern). Heavy dependence on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), something which was also a characteristic of other Southeast Asian communist movements, hardened into something like a patron-client relationship which was hard to end. Later on, the CPT leaders became strongly obsessed with Chinese ideology and policies, and their ignorance of original Marxist doctrine and their lack of thorough understanding of Thai society were clearly apparent.

Chapter Two is concerned with the relationship between the intellectuals and the CPT. From the early 1970s, Thai students had emerged as a new political force, realising that the task of fighting for democracy had fallen to them. At the same time, the government's campaign of suppression forced the CPT to retreat decisively from urban activities. The popular uprising on 14 October, 1973 took the CPT by surprise. However, the party quickly capitalised on the incident and in only two years, with the help of a rapidly changing situation, gained leadership over the student movement.

The author discusses the development of this situation in detail and argues against some of the myths concerning the students and the CPT in that period. Even though the student activists were not ideological communists

but rather sentimental humanitarians, the majority of them in the course of events eventually affiliated to the CPT and accepted the party's policy, strategy and slogans. After the 6 October 1976 massacre, which was followed by the military coup d'etat, many of them devoted their lives to the revolution, though it is true that they had only a vague picture of the CPT and their theoretical understanding was far from thorough.

In the jungle, the intellectuals differed starkly from the CPT activists, who were mostly peasants, in perception and social background. It is obvious that without a strong common ideology and fellow feeling, and without strenuous attempts on both sides to adapt to each other, the two groups were unlikely to work together for a fruitful revolution in the long term. Though in the beginning, shared feelings of revenge and disgust at the brutality of the ruling class bound them together, conflict began when the intellectuals realised that their expectation of their comrades was unrealistic. Unfortunately, when this conflict first exploded in the south, the CPT did not learn enough from the incident and tried to minimize the potential damage. Moreover, the party was plagued with multiple problems. In the beginning, the conflict may have been personal, involving the rank and file, but ultimately it was of a fundamental, ideological nature, focusing on the CPT leadership.

The nature of the conflict is discussed in Chapter Three, the core of this study. There were three main factors that contributed fundamentally to the "crisis of confidence" that ended with the split between the intellectuals and the CPT, causing a severe setback to the party.

The first factor was the international situation, particularly the conflict among the communist states in Southeast Asia and the changes that were taking place in China. Because of the Southeast Asian conflict, in material terms the CPT lost its relationship with Vietnam and Laos, and consequently support from China via Laos was also cut off. The closure of the "voice of the People of Thailand" (VOPT), the CPT's clandestine radio

station in Yunnan, was another tremendous blow, as it was the CPT's only reliable means of communist action. These incidents widely demoralised and confused the CPT activists, causing them to lose faith in socialism. Moreover, these external changes exposed more clearly the CPT's defects on ideological and policy issues, especially the CPT leadership's Chinese orientation. They also gave the intellectuals an excellent opportunity to initiate a strong ideological debate against the CPT leadership.

The second factor was the shift in the government's counter-insurgency policy, from an emphasis on military means to one on political means. The imposition of the Prime Minister's order number 66/23, which gave an amnesty to communists who gave themselves up, opened an alternative for the intellectuals, peasants and others, especially those who had entered into conflict with the CPT, enabling them to leave the jungle.

The third factor was the defects within the CPT itself. Of the three factors, this was the most significant. The CPT, while admitting some faults, argued that its own defects were not the decisive factor in the "crisis of confidence". The author, like other observers, maintains that the root of the crisis lay in the internal problems of the party itself.

First of all, there was a lack of autonomy and independence, especially at the level of leadership. This was a direct consequence of the dependent character of the communist movement in Thailand, already referred to, which went back to its origins. With the CPT, whether consciously or not, following China so completely and blindly, there was inevitably great confusion whenever there were any major changes in China's stance. Considering that the party was fighting a well-armed government and that it needed whatever support it could get from abroad, while internally it had to be Thai-oriented to win the confidence of the Thai people, this mistake guaranteed the failure of the revolution. Strategically, this meant that the CPT was even more rigid than the "reactionary" government it was fighting in terms of its ability to adapt and respond to the rapidly changing situation.

The CPT's behaviour corresponded to its position within the structure of Thai society, which had long been dominated by Sakdina ideology. Despite vigorous attempts and claims to be a proletarian party equipped with the scientific theories of revolution, the CPT could not avoid being infected with the conservative aspects of Sakdina ideology. Sakdina's hierarchy of social relations, especially patron-client relationships, went hand-in-hand with the party's emphasis on centralism, in spite of its principle of democratic centralism. Theoretical and moral education, which might have minimised this deficiency, were not carried out sufficiently, so that the CPT ended up in a similar position to other bureaucratic organisations in Thai society: corrupt, inefficient and undemocratic. Overconfidence within the CPT leadership not only undermined the vital principle of criticism and self-criticism, but also ruled out the possibility of an effective united front, based on equality and co-operation, between the CPT and various progressive forces.

The split between the intellectuals and the CPT, discussed in Chapter Four, was therefore inevitable. Though the CPT leadership had foreseen it, the major cause was not what it supposed, and the degree of damage was far greater than it had presumed. Defections among intellectuals sparked off a chain reaction, although peasants deserted the CPT because of personal problems rather than ideological conflicts, as was the case with the intellectuals.

This "crisis of confidence" forced the CPT to hold its long-awaited Fourth Party Congress in an ultimate attempt to reverse the slump in the revolution although conditions were not favourable. The divided Congress reflected the most violent internal conflict and debate in the party's history - with a struggle between the conservative, dominant faction and the more moderate faction. The result was unclear but the Maoist faction apparently retained the upper hand and was able to block a considerable part of the reforms proposed. The Congress was yet another disappointment for

those who wanted radical changes. Though the Congress recognised some internal faults within the party and proposed solutions, the changes were only minor and were carried out half-heartedly. People were still sceptical of the CPT's maintenance of armed struggle and of the continuing domination of the old guard within the CPT's leadership. The new party programme appeared to be only another cosmetic political change for the purpose of regaining the recognition and support of progressive and moderate forces, while the majority of the CPT's leading cadres were conservative, dogmatic and bureaucratic.

Moreover, the political environment, both in Thailand and abroad, had become more unfavourable to the communist movement in Thailand. The apparent rapid expansion of capitalism, the success of the service and export sectors, the growth of the middle class and the liberal political atmosphere, all seemed greatly to diminish the possibility of violent revolution. In addition, the government was effectively hampering the CPT's reorganisation - an absolute necessity if the party was to rejuvenate itself and continue as a significant political pressure group in Thailand - especially in urban areas.

In the final chapter, Chapter Five, it is argued that there are grounds for believing that the CPT will continue its propagation and expansion, as the government's measures are far from effective in eradicating social grievances. Thai characteristics - the influence of Buddhism, the Thai personality and national independence - which are proposed by some authors as being the main obstacles impeding the CPT's revolution, are shown not to be so under certain conditions. The future of the CPT depends, on the one hand, on the situation and conditions in Thailand and also in the world, and, on the other hand, on the party itself and its future ideological development. In the appendix to the study the nature of life in the jungle with the CPT is outlined.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Background of the CPT:
A Party from Outside

"The communist party is the outcome of an integration of Marxism with the proletarian movement in each specific country."

CPT, 1977¹

Thailand, or Siam as it used to be called until 1940, is a country in Southeast Asia, sharing some characteristics with her neighbours and certainly having many idiosyncrasies. Whether it was "a semi-colonial, semi-feudal" society because "foreign capital embarked upon industrial enterprises over 120 years ago" and "the Thai proletariat came into being" as the CPT depicted it,² is still debatable; it also has to be explained how the proletariat grasped Marxism as its guide for its struggle. What is certain from the historical evidence available now is that the launching of communism, or in other words Marxist socialism, in Thailand was not initiated by the Thai people themselves nor designed specifically for the Thais.

This is not to say that ideas of socialism had not been present in this Buddhist Kingdom before the arrival of Marxism, but rather that there was virtually no basis for their growth socially and ideologically. In fact a form of Utopian socialism, in terms Engels used to contrast with his and Marx's "scientific socialism", had prevailed in Thai society since it adopted Theravada Buddhism hundreds of years ago. In Buddhist texts, Malai Sutra and Akkanya Sutra, and in the Uttara kura in Trai Phum Pra Ruang (The Three Worlds of King Ruang, written in the Fourteenth century Sukothai Kingdom), there was a mention of an ideal type of society, the Sri Araya Maitreya Society: peaceful, abundant, with no ruling class or state, co-operatives in work, without quarrels or exploitation, monogamous, and with everybody the shared owner of all property and private property denounced. This society was to be preceded by a period of natural disasters and social disorders called Miksanyi and Kaliyuk. Though according to the Buddhist texts, the only way to reach this ideal futuristic society was to wait and make merit,

the belief was indeed utilized by leaders of peasant millenarian revolts in both the Ayudhya and Bangkok periods to recruit followers who were made to believe that the time had come.

The other two variants of "socialist" ideology, according to Ponpirom Iamtham (1982)³, were Phraya Suriyamuwat's "Suppsart" and Pridi Phanomyong's economic plan. Both were Western-educated and proposed their ideas systematically in terms of a solution to economic problems. Suppasart (literally, the knowledge of Property) was written in 1911 to encourage re-distribution of income and wealth through a co-operative system, and was later banned by King Vachiravuth (Rama VI) who argued that except for him all Thais were already equal.

This book impressed Pridi, who was influenced by the socialism of thinkers like Saint-Simon, Fourier, Louis Blanc, Prondhon and Pacquer. Pridi's economic plan was an attempt to adapt socialist economic theories to Thai society, but to some extent it was bureaucratic rather than revolutionary because it promoted a centralised state-controlled economy, and, while guaranteeing the basic security of the people, it also preserved in continuity the rich and capitalists in the society. Though Pridi came from the ruling bureaucratic group and was the leader of the "1932 revolution" that ended the Absolute Monarchy, King Prachatiok (Rama VII) attacked his plan as similar to that of Stalin. A campaign against Pridi was organised by a right-wing faction of the government, and he had to leave Thailand for a while.

These versions of "socialism", though influenced by Western ideas, were not at any point near to Marxism or communism. A major factor, this author believes, was that the Thais who had the opportunity to be educated in the West at that time belonged almost exclusively to a small social group of royalty and top civil servants - in other words they were from the Sakdina class. It was unlikely that they would willingly bring back ideologies that could endanger the establishment that maintained their privileges. It is

clear that even though the Absolute Monarchy came to an end, the representatives of the Sakdina system (the Thai feudal system, in a rough approximation which can, however, be a misleading one) were still very influential. Thadeus Flood reveals that the retreat of early socialist ideas reflects the strength of the royalist forces, and these royalist aristocrats who were at Czarist Russian schools at the time of the 1917 revolution were the earliest Thai anti-communists, who viewed Pridi as a "Lenin" or "Stalin".⁴

Obviously, there must have been some other socialist-minded people among those who had a formal education both in Thailand and in the West, apart from the democratic and liberal ones. So far little is known about the Thais -such as the group of thirteen aristocrats who petitioned King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in 1885, the "Young Turks" who made an attempt coup d'etat in 1912, and intellectuals like K.S.R. Kularb and Tieniran. Though these people were indirectly the "mentors" of intellectuals in later generations - most importantly Pridi - it is important to note that this sort of liberal ideology emerged not from the direct contradiction of Sakdina production relations, but from individual perceptions.⁵ Moreover, due to the fact that these ideas were disseminated through literature and to an extent originated from a section of a ruling or would-be ruling elite itself against the existing system, they were confined within a limited group of people and never took root among "the toiling masses", whether they were proletariat or not.

This is why there has been endless debate on the significance of the 1932 incident. Numerous studies and reappraisals have been written on this turning point in Thai political history. Some, especially by those who adopt the Marxist point of view, argue strongly against crediting it with the term "revolution". Though several peasant rebellions failed to make any radical changes in the Sakdina system, they had an impact on royal decisions. There is no solid evidence to conclude, as Ponpirom does, that historical

conditions in Thai society were not favourable to the overthrow of the Sakdina system from below, and that the elite could make such an attempt.⁶ One cannot deny the inevitable role of intellectuals or even some sections of the elite, and the uniqueness of the Sakdina system and Thai cultural patterns. However, there is not enough evidence to substantiate the claim that Thailand is an exception to mass uprising under communist ideology as happened in other countries around the world.

The fact is that, though leading the change, Pridi and his like-minded followers soon lost real political control and failed to make the substantial progress they had planned. The 1932 incident amounted to a shift in the control of political power from the hands of royalty and aristocrats to a broader group comprising conservative bureaucrats and the military. The aristocratic element in the supposedly democratic government remained very influential. In other words, the 1932 incident did not overthrow the old system and introduce a new one. The Sakdina system still existed, particularly its superstructure. Certainly no toiling masses participated at any stage, nor did they know anything about the ideologies of the incident or about any consequences from which they might benefit.⁷

There were several reasons why the Thais at that time were so apathetic and why any kind of anti-Sakdina ideology was so slow and limited in its spread. As the Western powers did not turn Thailand into another colony, they never really tried to change or undermine the Sakdina system, especially through education. This had immediate consequences. Firstly, Western education was limited to a handful of people and those who had an opportunity to go to study in the West were limited to the Sakdina class and to those whom the Sakdina class trusted. This meant the Thais in general had no access whatsoever to Western ideas because books that contained them had not yet been translated into Thai.

Secondly, the Sakdina structure of Thai society still remained intact. Western powers did not interfere with internal affairs as long as they could exploit the raw materials they wanted from Thailand to feed the expanding world market. The bourgeois element in Thai society was therefore weak and developed very slowly. Moreover, this new class was predominantly Chinese and this Chinese bourgeoisie preferred to compromise with the Sakdina system rather than challenge it. Traditionally trade and commerce were occupations which were looked down upon by all walks of life and large-scale commerce was in any case monopolised by the Royal government. Therefore, no independent Thai bourgeois class emerged and came into class conflict with the existing Sakdina class. It is also argued that in fact the Sakdina class, the rising bureaucrats and military, and the new bourgeoisie acted as compradores vis a vis the Western imperialist powers.

Historically, liberalism, capitalism and socialist ideologies had no chance to emerge by themselves on Thai soil, they had to be imported from Western countries. Consequently, these ideologies emerged, or strictly speaking were introduced, into Thailand without a mass base or any social foundation, but were limited to those who had been exposed to them one way or another.⁸

Thus, although there were mass revolts, intellectual dissent, an abortive coup and a successful "revolution", these had no connection at all with the origin of the communist movements which later developed into the CPT.

The Origins of Communist Movements in Thailand

Historical analysis of the early stages of communist movements in Thailand has hardly begun.⁹ The CPT itself gave only two formal accounts of its own history, in 1977 a brief introduction of the history of the CPT and the statement in commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the founding of the CPT. These documents are very doctrinal, full of slogans, claim too much

credit for the party's actions and are too general, typical of statements of any communist party. Some underground articles with information concerning this period are available, supplemented by bits and pieces informally told to cadres and later to some of the rank and file of the party, (particularly the intellectuals who remained in the CPT after the "crisis of confidence"), but these revelations have never been gathered and systematically documented to check that they are reliable. Since communist activities have been outlawed from the early stages (except for a few years), it is understandable that the CPT would not reveal a full and accurate version of its history which could benefit government counter-insurgency measures.¹⁰ However, these two short narratives of 1977 are superficial, with a lot of ambiguous wording, and suggest to the critical reader that the distortions are deliberate.

Quite a number of authors have attempted to give an accurate picture of Thai communism, though there is no single authority.¹¹ However, on important issues there seems to be a consensus. If communism means Marxist-Leninist ideologies and their organisational forms, the introduction of communism into Thailand and every other Southeast Asian country was done by non-natives, either from within that particular country or from the region as a whole.¹²

There are several reasons why foreign communists came to Thailand. Firstly, Thailand was the only country to have a non-colonial government in that part of Asia, and the Thai government was not committed to anti-communist measures as it identified communist movements with national liberation movements, which were not likely to interfere with Thai internal affairs. Secondly, Thailand's geographical position as a mainland state in the middle of Southeast Asia was favourable. Thirdly, Thailand had considerable Chinese and Vietnamese minorities which could provide the communist movements in China and Vietnam with financial aid, shelter and labour.¹³ Finally, the Communist International had been interested in the Southeast Asian region since its first congress in 1920,¹⁴ and there were

regular debates over the questions of revolution in colonies which covered countries in Southeast Asia. Van der Kroef seems certain that it was at the behest of the Comintern that communist parties in Southeast Asia were made or unmade,¹⁵ and that the region was considered a mere appendage of China in Comintern strategic thinking.¹⁶

The earliest communist arrivals in Thailand were in 1923, when the CCP sent six cadres led by Lin Xue to begin their proselytising among the Thai Chinese and to lay a basis for the subsequent founding of the Thai party.¹⁷ In 1926 the CCP formed a "South Seas Committee" to maintain contact with national revolutionary organisations in Southeast Asia.¹⁸ The first communist group to bear a name involving Thailand (Siam) was the Communist Youth of Siam (CYS), founded by several hundred Chinese youths in 1927, which was the most visible manifestation of the Communist Party of Siam (CPS).¹⁹

There were apparently two communist parties operating in Thailand at the time: the CPS which later became the CPT, and the Siam branch of the CCP or the Chinese Communist Party of Thailand (CCPT), though it is unclear about the relationship between these two parties and their size and influence.²⁰ Communist documents seized by the Royal Thai government in the late 1920s and early 1930s were addressed by either the CPS or the "Committee in Siam" of the "representatives in the South Seas".²¹ This seems to be because of the changing situation in China. In 1927 there was a split between the Kuomintang and the CCP which resulted in the mass arrest and massacre of Chinese communists and Vietnamese communists who had their headquarters in China. In 1928 the Sixth Comintern Congress played down Lenin's flexible approach (Lenin had died in 1926). The CCP realised that to propagate communism and focus mainly on Chinese revolution among the Chinese community in Southeast Asia was wrong, "South Seas people could liberate themselves successfully only by their indigenous revolutions."²²

The CPS then concentrated predominantly on Thai affairs, recruiting ethnic Thais and starting to study real situations in Thai society. The first mention of the Thai party in the Comintern was made in Wang Ming's report to the Seventh Congress in 1935.²³

Other non-Thai communists in Thailand were Indians, Indonesians and, most important, Vietnamese. The Vietnamese communists were active among Vietnamese immigrants in the northeast of Thailand. Ho Chi Minh is said to have been sent by the Comintern to assist the work of the CYS as early as 1928, apart from the purpose of recruiting mass support for the Vietnamese revolution itself. He then came to Thailand several times to coordinate the CYS (CPS) and the CCPT, preaching his social beliefs and even opening a Marxist school in the northeast.²⁴ Vietnamese-linked communist movements in the northeast had produced some prominent activists in leftist and communist circles, such as Tiang Sirikhan and Krong Chandawong (both were MPs, accused of being communists and later executed), Prasit Tiensiri (a CPT politburo member in charge of the southern region), Thong Jamsri (a CPT politburo member, deputy commander-in-chief of the People's Liberation Army of Thailand (PLAT) and in charge of foreign affairs).²⁵ However, though the Vietnamese were heavily involved in founding the communist movement in Thailand, later on most of them returned to Vietnam with Ho Chi Minh, and Vietnamese influence on the CPS gradually diminished.²⁶ The remaining members kept a low profile and concentrated on their national revolution.

The young Thai communist movements clearly faced severe suppression from the early stages. From 1929 to 1931 the government arrested several Chinese communists in Bangkok and the North.²⁷ In 1953 Phraya Manopakorn, the conservative prime minister, seized the occasion of Pridi's being accused of being a communist because of his "socialist" economic plan to enact the first anti-communist legislation. From then on government propaganda characterised the communists as "devils", and later still as the number one enemy of the nation.

Furthermore, workers' organisations were banned and strict measures were employed successfully to block Chinese immigration. The CPT itself admits that leading CPS organs were disrupted and numerous party members imprisoned. The CPS's political role and activities were limited for a long period. The CPS then gradually collapsed, apparently in 1936. Ponpirom believes, therefore, that until the foundation of the CPT on 1 December 1942, the CPT was for a short time divided into two sections one of which concentrated on work with the Sino-Thais, the other on non-Chinese Thais.²⁹ The CPT, firstly named the Thai Communist Party until its Second Congress in 1952, was originally led by Li Huo, a CCP member until he and some Chinese returned to China after the victory of the Chinese revolution in 1949. The other Chinese joined the CPT, including members of the CCPT when it was abolished. During the early 1950s, the CCPT had an estimated membership of around 4,000 compared to less than 200 in the CPT. What in fact occurred was that though the CCPT was dissolved, the more numerous, better-motivated and more experienced Sino-Thai communists took over direction of the CPT.³⁰

In summary, the evidence suggests that the Chinese have dominated communist movements in Thailand since the beginning. It is a fact that heavy foreign dependence, particular on the Chinese communists, is characteristic of the early stages of communism in every Southeast Asian country.³¹ In addition, the failure of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), which should have developed into the leading regional party, left all communists and their sympathizers in Southeast Asia no alternative but to adhere to the CCP. These southeast Asian communist parties later stepped into the embrace of the CCP after the CCP's victory over the Kuomintang in 1949, the dissolution of the comintern, and the termination of relations between the Chinese and the Russian parties. In the last incident, the CPT, as its leadership proudly says, was one of the first parties to align with the CCP at the world conference of communist parties in Moscow in November 1957 and 1960. Snorakowski is right to point out that this alignment with China has not

wavered and ties with Moscow have been broken.³² This early naive dependence and faith in Chinese leadership have developed into a confirmed pattern similar to a patron-client relationship, so strong that in later generations new cadres who attempted to dissociate the CPT from the CCP found it difficult to loosen this bond.

As Thai communism did not arise from Thai soil, it is understandable that the communists could not at first recruit the left wing of the Pridi-led People's Party which was the most progressive force in Thai society at the time, but had to infiltrate predominantly among Chinese and Vietnamese minorities who had nationalistic sentiments and felt insecure in a foreign land. Moreover, the Chinese-led organisations focused on gaining popularity among their own people and winning support for their mother country and benefits for the Chinese in Thailand. Because of inexperience, their stance was pitched too far to the left, as seen particularly in the hostile reaction to Pridi and the People's Party as a whole. Some of their leaflets reflect their lack of knowledge of Thai politics and the Thai mass psychology. They perceived some trivial achievements, such as hanging a red flag in front of a police station, as an important stepping stone to victory, while they were actually premature and too optimistic. Their propaganda documents did not match reality, which was that the movement was fragmented and the leading figures weak.

The Chinese-oriented tendency of the CPT

The CPT, though it tried to recruit more ethnic Thai and adapt Marxism to Thai society, could not get away from the Chinese. It is generally believed that the early converts were mostly, if not all, Sino-Thai. These pioneer "Thai" communists, such as Damri Ruengsntham, Prasong Wangwiwat, Wirat Angkathaworn, Song Noppakun and Nid Pongdarbpetch, later dominated the leadership of the CPT from its first Congress in 1942 to the fourth Congress in 1982 - an interrupted period of 40 years - without any serious

challenge.³³ It is also believed that early education in communism, both on the theory and practical conduct of the revolution, was carried out in Chinese as until 1950 there was no translation of any Marxist-Leninist texts into Thai,³⁴ and the CPT leadership always went to study at the Marxist-Leninist Institute in Peking.³⁵ Documents seized by the government were mostly in Chinese too.

The most important document of this period was, perhaps, the "Draft Statement analysing the government and economy of Siam and the procedures for the associations", approved by the special enlarged committee of the CCPT on 20 March, 1930.³⁶ This was the first Marxist analysis of the Thai social, economic and political system. The document emphasized imperialism as the main target of revolution and revealed rather a superficial view of Thai society. The important point is that this analysis drew quite heavily on Mao Tse Tung's "Analysis of Class in Chinese Society, 1926" to the extent that Chinese and Thai social structures seem almost indistinguishable.³⁷

This shameful plagiarism was repeated again and again until the CPT encountered its "crisis of confidence" in the late 1970s. There were two immediate consequences. Firstly, apart from some small handbooks, the CPT leadership never really tried to adapt Marxism to Thai society, but simply adopted ready-made Chinese texts, perceiving Thai and Chinese societies as basically the same. Nationalist resentment of the CCP never emerged among Thai communists as Van der Kroef assumes.³⁸

Secondly, this document of 1930 provided the guidelines for subsequent analyses of Thai society, revolutionary strategies and policies. The greatest handicap of all was the strong stand against imperialism.³⁹ As inhabitants of an independent country, the Thais had virtually no vision of imperialism and its exploitation. Although it was theoretically correct, it could hardly convince ordinary Thais whose level of education and social consciousness was too low to grasp an abstraction like imperialism.⁴⁰ Apart

from the period of World War II, when Thailand was actually occupied by Japanese invaders, the ideas of British, French and later American and Soviet imperialism had little or no meaning for Thais.

Furthermore, this low level of education and social consciousness also severely limited the understanding ordinary Thais could bring to the technical terms used in communist documents in general. This problem was never solved, though later on the CPT was able to recruit more supporters, mostly uneducated peasants. These "communists", if they could really be called that, hardly knew more of communist ideology than the names of the "Five Great Teachers" - Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. They were led to believe and put faith in the "correct leadership of the CPT and Mao Tse Tung's Thought". In fact the Chinese-oriented leaders of the CPT expanded their ties with China to cover the whole party.

To be fair, communist movements, at least in the early stages, were largely alien to Thai society. This, however, is not the view of authors like Wilson (1959), Thompson and Adloff (1950) or Lovelace (1971). Certainly, Thai society is not loosely structured in the sense that Embree (1952) hypothesizes. Communist movements in Thailand were alien in the sense that they were not born among Thai people by the development of economic and political situations in Thailand, as they ought to have been according to Marxist doctrine, but were brought in by foreigners, particularly the Chinese, about whom the Thais, like other native Southeast Asians, had long-standing suspicions. Moreover, heavy dependence on Chinese communists at the outset did not decline as time passed by and the party recruited more ethnic Thais, because the leadership of the CPT had been overwhelmingly dominated by the faithful followers of the Chinese communists. They were so obsessed with Chinese ideology and policy that they never seriously studied Marxism in its original forms, never took a critical view of China, rejected the experiences of other communist movements, and totally forgot to observe changing situations and circumstances in their own country.

The reasons why the CPT took root and developed to become a mass party and to "accumulate victories" step by step - with setbacks of course - in the first forty years, was the fact that the Thais really suffered from the oppression and exploitation of the ruling class, and indirectly, to some extent, of imperialism. Historically, there was a need for a major social change, whether peaceful or violent, for a better society.⁴¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that the CPT - with determined members and an ability to challenge the existing establishment - emerged as a serious alternative, which for many years more and more Thais chose to follow. It is quite possible that if certain major factors had not emerged coincidentally in the late 1970s, the revolutionary war conducted and led by the CPT could have gained victory within ten years of the bloody coup d'état that ended the parliamentary system in 1976. However, unfortunate faults and mistakes going back to the very early period led the CPT to catastrophe, as we shall see in the following chapters.

FOOTNOTES

1. A Brief Introduction to the History of the Communist Party of Thailand 1942-1977, broadcast over the Voice of the People of Thailand, clandestinely in Thai to Thailand, 9 December 1977 in The Road to Victory: Documents from the Communist Party of Thailand, Liberator Press, Chicago (no publication date, but likely to be in 1978).
2. Ibid.
3. Ponpirom Aimthan, Social Origins and the Development of the Communist Party of Thailand, 1982, p. 34. (Later referred to as Ponpirom. Thai authors are referred to by their first names.)
 4. Ibid., p. 37.
5. Ibid., p. 17.
6. Ibid., p. 17.
7. There is a joke well-known among Thai students that the Thai people at the time of the 1932 'Revolution' knew virtually nothing about this incident and thought the word 'Prachattipattai' (Democracy) was the name of a People's Party leader's son.
8. Ponpirom, op. cit., pp. 14-15.
9. In fact knowledge about the CPT as a whole - its origin, its leadership and its organization - remains poor. This partly shows the success of the CPT in maintaining secrecy. However the author found that at least in the later period Thai government intelligence on the CPT was much better than is generally assumed.
10. Tandrup, A., Internal Colonialism and Revolutionary War, 1982, p. 99.
11. Tandrup has a good review of most of these works with the exception of studies done by Kanok Wongtragoon, 'Communist Revolutionary Process', 1982 and Ponpirom - the latter deals directly and in depth with the social origins and the development of the CPT. It is extremely difficult to evaluate these studies. There are variations in nearly every detail and early studies do not refer to certain sources of their information. Most of the studies seem biased for or against the CPT. Ponpirom, according to materials available to the author, is the only scholar who thoroughly relates communist movements in Thailand to the dynamic development of the Thai setting. Certainly communism in Thailand is far too complex to be explained in any narrow sense.
12. Van der Kroef, M., Communism in South-East Asia, 1981, p. 54.
13. Ponpirom, op.cit., p. 40; Lovelace, D.D., China and People's War in Thailand, 1964-1969, 1971; p. 14.
14. One finds, apart from Chinese and Indians, native Asians like Tan Malaka, Ho Chi Minh (alias of Nguyen Tat Thanh), Darsono, Alimin Muso, Semaun and others active in the Comintern, see Wilson, A., 'Thailand and Marxism' 1959; p. 245.

15. Van der Kroef, op.cit., p. 59.
16. ibid., p. 6.
17. Ibid., p. 7; Morell, D. and Chaiananda Samudavanija, Political Conflict in Thailand - Reform, Reaction, Revolution, 1981; p. 78 point out that there is evidence that a few Thai intellectuals sympathetic to communist ideology joined the party as early as 1927, as during the next three years several articles in newspapers advocated revolutionary measures to end the Absolute Monarchy and suggested the creation of an egalitarian society.
18. Van der Kroef, op.cit., p. 7.
19. Ibid, pp. 8-9. He indicates that some Thai sources claim the CPS originated at about the same time as the CYS. The CPT in its brief introduction says that 1927 was the year that Marxist groups began political works and the CPS was founded in 1930. Kanok quotes Helen R. Chauncey 'The Growth of the United Front', Southeast Asia Chronicle No. 60, 1978, asserting that the CPS was founded by Ho Chi Minh in north-eastern Thailand among Thais and Vietnamese (p. 48).
20. Kanok, p. 48; Lovelace, 1971, p. 14; Van der Kroef, 1981, p. 22; Ponpirom, pp. 46-47, and Tandrup, p. 101 footnote 2.
21. Batson, B.A. (ed.) Siam's Political Future. Documents from the End of the Absolute Monarchy, 1974, p. 64 footnote 13.
22. Ponpirom, op.cit., p. 43, quoting from the National Archive, King Rama VII, M 18/1 'The Translation of Chinese documents seized from a Chinese communist'.
23. Wilson, op.cit., p. 247; Ponpirom, op.cit., p. 47 footnote 50 quotes W. Withayawuth (pseud.) 'History and Some Lessons of Our Party', an underground excerpt, p. 8 that it was ratified by the Comintern only as a branch - not a party. Sworakowski, W.S., World Communism - A Handbook 1918-1965, 1973, p. 427 says that Rachi spoke on behalf of the Communist party of Siam in the Seventh Comintern Congress and the Comintern recognized the CPT in 1942, one of the last parties to join before its dissolution in 1943.
24. Lovelace, p. 14; Van der Kroef, p. 9; Ponpirom, pp. 47-48; Sanchai, p. 82; and Morell & Chaiananda, p. 79.
25. Ponpirom, op.cit., p. 49.
26. Kanok, op.cit., p. 49.
27. Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit., p. 79.
28. Ponpirom, op.cit., p. 50.
29. Van der Kroef, op.cit., p. 21.
30. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp. 66-68.
31. Van der Kroef, p. 61, Girling, J.L.S., Thailand - Society and Politics, 1981; p. 253.

32. Sworakowski, p. 429.
33. Girling, p. 254 footnote 4 quotes Zimmerman, R., Insurgency in Thailand, 1976, p. 19 asserting that "the backbone of the CPT still consists predominantly of the same 55 Sino-Thai leading cadres who formed the Central Committee in 1952".
34. According to Reynolds, C. & H. Lysa, 'Marxism in Thai Historical Studies', 1983, Marxist texts in the form of translations, imported books and Thai-language summaries of Marxist socio-economic theory were available in Thailand just after the Second World War, in 1950 to be precise. In this period very few Thai writers read Marx and Engels first hand and those who did simply accepted the Marxist schema without expressing scepticism about its applicability to Thai conditions.
35. Girling, p. 268 quotes Tanham, G.K., Trial in Thailand, 1974 and Zimmerman, Insurgency in Thailand, 1976, reporting a figure of more than 2500 Thai communists trained in China, Vietnam and Laos since the 1950s. He also quotes Somchai Rakwichit, a Thai countersubversion specialist, referring to ordinary 3-6 months training courses in Laos and 2-5 courses for high-level cadres in China.
36. For details, see Baston, pp. 66-71.
37. Nopporn Suwanpanich & Kraissak Chunhanan 'The CPT and Conflict in Indochina', A paper for the seminar on Vietnam, Indo-china and South-east Asia, 1980, The Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, p. 19 quoted in Ponpirom, op.cit., p. 46.
38. Van der Kroef, op.cit., p. 7.
39. A very good example is Aran Phrommachompu (pseud. of Udom Srisuwan, a CPT leader) 'Thailand - A Semicolony', written as a text for the analysis of Thai society among the CPT cadres. The analysis in this book which presents Thai society as semi-colonial, semi-feudal, remained the centrepiece of CPT theory until the party faced the crisis of the early 1980s. However, this first major analytical text in Thai which is supposed to be a Marxist interpretation of Thai conditions was 'discovered' by Songchai Na Yala (pseud., 1981) to be a mere derivation of Mao's 'the Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party' (1930). Detailed discussion of these works can be seen in Lysa, H. Thailand in the Nineteenth Century - Evolution of the Economy and Society, 1984, p. 165; Reynolds & Lysa, pp. 81-82, 93 and Ponpirom pp. 69-70.
40. Ponpirom, op.cit., p. 45
41. Details of the socio-political conditions in Thailand from the Sakdina period to early 1980s are thoroughly discussed in Ponpirom.

CHAPTER TWO

The CPT and the October 14 Movement:
A Classic Story of a Broken Marriage

Free people awake, lift up your faces!
Can spears, swords, even guns resist our power?
Do you long for liberty, for tranquility in the land?
Peace will come to you, only if you fight for it.
National Student Centre of Thailand, 1973¹

I have faith in and truly believe in the leadership of the CPT.
I want you, Father and Mother, to come to love the party and
its warriors as I do. I want you to help us. I will be
perfectly happy in sacrificing everything for the party ...
A student in the jungle, 1977²

I will continue to fight for the revolution, but not here
and not under the leadership of the CPT ...
A student defect from the CPT, 1980³

Much can be said about the CPT in the first thirty years since its founding in 1942. However, as the aim of this particular project is to review only the history of the party in the last fifteen years, discussion of the history of the CPT outside that particular period must be omitted, though some points will emerge anyway. Detailed analysis of the popular uprising in 1973 from the CPT's first congress can be found in Tandrup (1982), Ponpirom (1982), Girling (1981) and Van der Kroef (1981). However, the nature of the CPT's origin, as described in Chapter One, had enormous effects upon the development of the party as a whole and it became one of the major factors in the downfall of the CPT since the early 1980s.

After the founding of the CPT one of its main tasks was to recruit ethnic Thais as members and sympathizers. The Japanese occupation of Thailand during the second World War provided the first opportunity, as the CPT could use nationalist sentiment to attract both individuals and organisations. Moreover, in order to obtain Soviet consent to its admission to the United Nations Organisation in 1946 after the war ended, the Thai government had to repeal the anti-communist statute and allow the CPT to

appeal explicitly to Thai people. The party publicly issued a newspaper, "The Masses", as its propaganda machine, and began to mobilise workers and intellectuals, especially university students in Bangkok, making some headway among several labour unions and universities.

University student participation in the political process had a history of several decades in the Thai kingdom, but their role was minimal until the late 1960s. The first student demonstration took place in 1940, when the Phiboon government mobilised students to support the return of former Thai territories then under French control. Between 1952-7 some students were involved in the 'peace movement' and were arrested. In 1957, during a disputed general election, the students took to the streets again, but then there was not a single incident of overt political action for an entire decade, 1958-1968. In 1968 the students demonstrated against the arrest of a free speech advocate, a former MP, and against the martial law of Premier Thanom Kittikachorn. After the National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) was set up in 1972, the then general secretary Thirayut Bunmi led the students in protest³ against Japanese products and alleged Japanese financial exploitation. Student protest culminated in 1973, after a protest against the illegal killing of wild animals in a wildlife sanctuary, in a demand for democracy in the form of a free general election and a constitution. The arrest of thirteen student leaders, intellectuals and politicians a few months later led to student rallies, sit-ins and demonstrations all over the country, bloody fighting between soldiers and students on the streets of Bangkok, and eventually the fall of the Thanom government. This has been referred to as the "October 14 Movement".⁴

The October 14 uprising took the CPT by surprise. Though later the party tried to claim that this great event was partly inspired by the "propaganda of Marxism-Leninism and Mao's thought, with the encouragement of

armed struggle" to arouse social consciousness among the students⁵ - a claim which has been rigorously denied by student leaders of the period - it seems to have had few links with the student movement before the incident.

This was certainly the result of Premier Sarit's communist suppression campaign. When he became premier in 1957, he instituted dictatorial rule which caused major changes in Thailand. For the CPT, it meant a decisive retreat from urban activities. The party organisations located in Bangkok and largely concerned with publications and intellectuals were driven out of the capital to seek shelter in remote forested and mountainous areas. Several leading figures, such as Ruam Wongpan - a Politburo member who was the delegate to the World Communist party conference in Moscow in 1960 - were arrested and executed. The adoption of Mao's strategy of revolution and the need to survive forced the CPT to switch from urban to rural operations and from the attempt to combine legal with illegal activities to an emphasis on armed struggle.⁶

In the same period, the reign of terror was extended to all walks of life. The period of the 1960s is usually referred to as "the dark age of Thai intellectuals". The development of progressive or liberal and socialist thought (considered by the Thai ruling class to be the same as communism since the Second World War) was abruptly interrupted. Moreover, most of the university students were orientated toward Sakdina ideology, which taught them to be obedient and subordinate to more powerful or senior persons. They were apathetic towards events which had no immediate bearing on their personal affairs and the government remained generally popular even in the early 1970s.⁷

However, the internal and external situation of Thailand developed rapidly. The influence of capitalism had begun to make itself strongly felt from the mid-1960s. Enrolment in higher education doubled in the ten years between 1960-70, and new universities were established in all parts of the country, including a semi-open university. The expansion of education,

though backward and restricted in terms of academic freedom, eventually brought some of the students to a critical way of thinking and led them to question a great many conventional ideas, systems and eventually the political establishment itself. Progressive journals and magazines emerged one by one, supplemented by reprints of some postwar progressive literature, and these were very influential in the campaigning for democracy and for a fairer society. Students who had opportunities to do voluntary work in rural areas "discovered" the real poverty and the wide social gap within society.

At the same time, the nation was facing increasingly serious social problems, including the presence of a large number of American troops and military bases during the height of the Indochina War. In 1977, after two years of political relaxation, the Thanom-Prapas regime returned the country to a military, bureaucratic, oligarchic rule, though they could not employ the same brutal suppression as Sarit. The regime was so corrupt and arrogant that it alienated many strata of society including the royal family and various factions among the military, bureaucracy and bourgeoisie. Thai people were generally frustrated with the large and widening gap between a rapidly changing society and its stagnant political institutions. The situation was ripe for the students who had no experience of brutal suppression and no fear or hesitation to do what they thought was right. As a new political force with organisational capability, unity, manpower, information and prestige, the students realised that the task of fighting for democracy had fallen into their hands. This eventually led to the October 14 incident and the tyrannical Thanom, Prapas and Narong (Thanom's son) were forced to leave the country.⁸

It seems clear that the development of this situation was not inspired by, nor was it a by-product (whether direct or indirect) of the communist movement, though the CPT still had some cadres in Bangkok and probably in the universities.⁹ The big sweep of 1967, and a smaller one in 1972, nearly destroyed the CPT's Bangkok network,¹⁰ and most of those who were left were

deported to rural areas. Those who continued to work in the city kept a low profile. Ponpirom maintains that during the October 1973 campaign, the CPT still thought that the students would lose and ordered its cadres to stay out of the campaign to avoid suppression. Her interviews with many student leaders also revealed that they did not have contact with the CPT before the 1973 uprising. The CPT began to take an active interest in the student movement only in late 1973. Prior to this time the party had viewed students as soft-minded, intellectual bourgeois who were not truly committed to revolutionary struggle. This attitude can be observed, for example, in the party's document "The Problem of Revolution in Thailand".¹⁴

The October 14 uprising created a new situation and a great opportunity for the CPT. Although the majority of students returned to the classroom, thousands of them were still active in propagating democratic ideas and attempting to push the country towards the fairer society they vaguely thought it should have.¹² The political atmosphere was relatively open and liberal, while the ruling class was busy restabilizing and regaining its power. The students, for their part, found that social realities and problems were even worse than they had thought and became more radical. Apart from the CPT, they were the first group of urban political activists in Thailand to reach out to the masses and eventually bring the unorganised, latent political potential of the peasants and workers into operation. The students joined the peasants and workers to become the so-called "Three Co-ordinating Powers", and this created a very good chance for the CPT to assert its leadership.

It should be stressed that the student leaders' ideology in the 1973 uprising was far from socialist. Most of them were vague democrats, many were royalists or traditionalists, and some were definitely anti-communist.¹³ Before the uprising, they had little knowledge of communism or any form of socialism. The sudden decline of government suppression was like a revelation. As nearly all of the students were enthusiastic, sincere

idealists and nationalists, they continued in search of the most suitable ideology for bringing Thailand to prosperity, democracy, justice and peace. From liberal democrats with naive reformist ideals, the students were fast to learn Marxist and Maoist ideologies.¹⁴

Though a year later the ruling class began to fight back and the students became defensive, the student movement had taken root, recruiting more committed student activists, and in early 1976 it gained control over all twenty university student unions and won a majority on all university student councils. As a result of their experience in campaigning side by side with peasants and workers, students began to think that more radical structural changes were needed. Socialism attracted more and more students as it seemed to offer the only possible solution for Thai society. Ponpirom estimates that the interest in socialism and social revolution among students in this period was quantitatively much greater than at any time in the postwar period. Publications on socialism, communism and related topics poured out in enormous quantities. Nevertheless, in the beginning many students hoped that the changes they wanted could be achieved peacefully.

The CPT then began to intensify its campaign to propagate ideas of a Thai revolution to the students, and to recruit, organise and lead them to fight against the ruling class according to their policy. Apart from helping to publish books, magazines and newspapers on socialism and related topics, CPT cadres in the cities began to contact student leaders. Some of them already had personal contacts. These student leaders were soon drawn into political discussion and study. CPT cadres later revealed their identity to some students who showed signs of accepting socialism and the need for a social revolution. Even when such disclosures were not made, student leaders said that they knew who these persons were.

It may seem amazing to observers how readily students accepted the CPT's argument and later its leadership, over such a short period of time (around two years). However, the situation favoured the CPT, since parliamentary

democracy and the bureaucracy exposed themselves as corrupt, and no other opposition group offered a convincing interpretation of, and solution for, Thai society. As the right-wing ruling class struck back the students became more receptive to the CPT, and felt the need of someone on whom they could rely for protection.

After mid 1975 the situation deteriorated rapidly, with increasing violence against students, workers and peasants. The ruling class used its control over most of the media, especially the radio station, to frame the student movement as the social irritant, denouncing the students as disrupters of public order or even traitors.

From peaceful idealism, they began to shift towards feeling that armed self-defence was legitimate, and it was not difficult to develop this into a recognition of the need for armed struggle when the situation became more tense as students, workers and peasant leaders were beaten-up or killed again and again by right-wing gangsters. The idea of a peaceful transition to socialism, as first envisaged by optimistic students, was completely destroyed on 6 October 1976 in the massacre of students at Thammasart University in Bangkok, which was followed by a military coup which returned the country to martial law and a new reign of terror.

In spite of the various publications which were available, few students really studied them and achieved much ideological understanding in the course of this struggle. There was too much ferment, too much action, and too little time. The students were more eager to engage in action than in serious study and thought, and tended to accept the ready-made analysis provided by the CPT.¹⁵ Discussions on theory were rare except among top student leaders, and though most students had read the CPT documents and listened to VOPT propaganda, only a few of those who became CPT followers and had had a chance to visit real CPT camps had a rough idea of what the CPT

actually was. Whenever theoretical study was possible, Mao's works translated into Thai were the main books used, and they were widely recommended for general reading.

It is true that the students did not always understand what they read, but by 1976 they were far from being innocent, peaceful idealists. Gradually, the students affiliated themselves to the CPT and accepted the party's policy, strategy and slogans as their guide. For example, they praised China as a people's achievement in creating their own just and advanced society, and they denounced the Soviet Union as revisionist.¹⁶

Attachment to the CPT was strengthened by government propaganda being shown so clearly to be false. Being young, optimistic and inexperienced, the students fell prey to the appeal of the CPT which had emerged as the most important and effective opposition group, providing a progressive and sophisticated ideology, backed by an armed organisation able to challenge the military leadership of the ruling class. They tended to see only its good side though, and lacked a critical approach to it.

The 6 October incident and its aftermath was devastating. The great majority of student activists felt deeply that peaceful action was no longer possible and they prepared to subject themselves to the CPT, however hard it was going to be. They saw this course of action as the only way to avenge their fallen friends and achieve their aim of a just society.

Certainly, the students were not ideological communists. They were sentimental and humanitarian rather than revolutionary. Ponpirom's statement that the student leaders cheered when more people got killed by the reactionaries¹⁷ is absurd, and incompatible with the author's personal experience.

It is difficult to find evidence to contradict Wedel's analysis¹⁸ that the CPT distorted its image to win the students' support. If this was the case, then those efforts must have been aimed at top student leaders, and not at the student movement as a whole. Nonetheless, it is naive to maintain

that the students - or the "radicals" as Wedel calls them - were not "ideologically committed to the party" or were "not under communist party ideological discipline".¹⁹ Many students were already in search of the CPT before being personally contacted by a CPT agent. On the contrary, hundreds of students and intellectuals in the jungle tried very hard indeed from the beginning to become "good children of the party".²⁰

There is no solid evidence as to how far the CPT had penetrated and taken control of the student movement between 1973-1976. However, it is clear that during 1975-1976 the CPT succeeded in getting its agents into key positions in student organisations, and was able to use journals such as Athipat (NSCT's newspaper) and Asia magazine to provide guidelines for the movement. It also inserted its agents and sympathisers into university student organs, teacher training colleges, some vocational and many prestigious high schools and other educational institutions in every part of Thailand. The students also helped organise close links between the countryside and the cities, between workers and peasants, and they developed guidelines for them. Some students who had become committed CPT followers made visits to CPT camps in the jungle and were trained in how to use weapons.²² The CPT even had some students organise peasants from their bases in the cities rather than using their own cadres from camps in the jungle.²³

Most CPT agents did not publicly hold official posts in the NSCT or student unions, but formed part of clandestine groups that discussed and analysed the political situation and decided on the action to be taken.²⁴ There were also secret plans prepared in advance to cope with an emergency situation.²⁵ This sort of connection held nearly all student activists together after the 6 October coup d'etat and enabled the CPT to contact, mobilise and transport the students into the jungle.

It is likely that, without the CPT's infiltration of the student movement, the student activists would not have adopted the extreme, far-left strategies they did. They did this despite the warnings of well wishers,

including the rector of Thammasart University. By confronting the authorities continuously and pushing too hard and indiscriminately, rather than pursuing their aims quietly according to a flexible strategy, they alienated those in the centre - the moderates - and isolated themselves from public support. There was debate among student activists on whether the movement had gone too far ahead of the people, but those who hesitated were accused of being reformists, revisionists or Soviet liners.²⁷ It is reasonable to argue that the CPT was one cause of the demise of the student movement and democracy in October 1976.

The massacre and military coup on 6 October 1976 were of the utmost significance not only to the CPT but also to the students. A lesson had been given, as the CPT and intellectuals who broadcast through the VOPT later repeatedly said, that there was no alternative for patriotic and democratic people to armed struggle - a peaceful way to a better Thai society was hopeless. The result was a major influx of a large number of people - mostly urban educated - into the embrace of the CPT. It was not the first time that the government's oppressive measures had pushed Thai people towards the CPT, but, as an anti-communist analyst pointed out, this time it was a major victory for the CPT because the government had provided the party with a large number of high-quality, well-educated and mostly young, active citizens such as the party had never won before.²⁸

Consequently, the CPT was able for the first time to form a real national front with people who could be considered as representatives of all non-ruling social strata. After a series of statements pointing to the need to unite the available forces to overthrow the reactionary state through armed revolution, which was broadcast over the VOPT by students, politicians, teachers, union and peasant leaders, journalists, civil servants and others, the formation of the "Committee for Co-ordinating Patriotic and Democratic Forces" (CCPDF) was announced in September 1977 with Udom Srisuwan, a CPT politburo member, as chairman. The number of people who fled to join the CPT

was never made clear, but the same government agent estimated that in the six months following October 1976 about 1,500 students and intellectuals fled to join the CPT,²⁹ and the total figure was said to be around 3,000.

Stating that there was no other choice and that violence was inevitable did not in itself imply that all these people really needed to leave their homes to live laborious lives in the jungle and raise arms against the government. Although thousands of people were arrested or threatened, only a minority of them were in actual danger from right-wing forces, including those who were prominent leaders or who were outspoken critics, speakers or activists on platforms, in factories or in villages. However, there was widespread fear and there were rumours of the brutal torture and rape of those arrested, and of untraceable disappearances - allegations which for the most part proved to be untrue.

Fear thus tempted many progressive urban people to flee to join the CPT. At the same time there were also people prepared to work clandestinely, both legally and illegally, under the guidance of the CPT in the cities, in the institutions and organisations they had joined before the coup. However, the CPT persuaded many of them to withdraw to the countryside, which was "a reliable rear area and a powerful reserve for the revolutionary movement". The students simply obeyed this appeal, knowing that they could have stayed in the cities, where they would have been more useful in familiar surroundings. The students were so strongly motivated by a desire to avenge their dead friends and bring about a better society as soon as possible that whatever the CPT said seemed to be the only way to fulfil their aims.³⁰

The students in the jungle: A short honeymoon

Every student guessed that life in the jungle would be very hard and dangerous, but most of them had no knowledge of what it would really be like apart from pictures painted by government propaganda and images gained through reading books about the Russian and Chinese revolutions. Ultimately,

they had a romantic, idealistic view. Although living in hardship, constantly threatened by the reactionary armed forces, the comrades must be truly dedicated communists - living a simple life, thrifty, hard working, putting others before themselves, free of self-interest, modest, highly disciplined, and, in the case of leaders, having a thorough knowledge of Marxism and revolution, yet at the same time open to differing opinions and criticism.³¹ This picture could be expanded endlessly according to individual expectations, but generally the comrades were thought to be like heavenly figures rather than ordinary human beings. The CPT itself was seen to be an idealistic, socialist, revolutionary organisation which fully exercised democratic centralism; the jungle was thought to be a lovely place to live in.

And indeed, at least initially newcomers and old comrades in the jungle apparently understood each other through a shared desire for revenge, and disgust at the brutality of the ruling class.³²

It was a sweet honeymoon, followed by a period of around three years (1976-9) during which the October 14 movement remained married to the armed revolutionary CPT. The contribution the CPT received from the intellectuals was greater than anything the party itself had achieved with its mainly peasant cadres and supporters during the first eleven years of armed struggle. The influx of a variety of people and the formation of the CCPDF improved the image of the CPT from that of a treacherous terrorist organisation to one of a reasonable vanguard in the struggle for democracy.

The intellectuals enriched the CPT's propaganda and education, enhancing the former's quality and psychological impact and upgrading the theoretical teaching of the latter. They transformed revolutionary culture from being dry, stereotyped and Chinese-oriented, to being lively, innovative and Thai-orientated. They took part in the improvement of medical and pharmaceutical services, in the production and repair of weapons, and of war techniques. With the intellectuals, the new front, the CCPDF, expanded

foreign connections and gained support from sympathizers abroad, making the propaganda campaign against the government overseas much stronger than it had ever been. The CPT was recognised as leading the fight for freedom and justice by many progressive individuals and groups around the world, not only in a handful of communist countries as before.³³

The intellectuals devoted themselves to the expansion of the revolution in every way. They were enthusiastic and over-optimistic about the progress of the revolution. They boosted the morale of the CPT's armed forces. With the CPT's commands, the PLAT's attacks on government forces and installations greatly increased.³⁴ The guerrilla war expanded to cover more than 50 of the 72 provinces in 1979. The number of strongholds or revolutionary bases increased and some areas were technically liberated. Both the Thai and foreign governments showed serious concern over the rapid development of the CPT. There were predictions of the possibility of urban insurrection and the takeover of state power.³⁵

However, if the October 14 movement's association with the CPT can be called a marriage, it was a smooth and happy one for only the first four months, at least in some CPT areas in the south.

In contrast to the 1973 uprising, CPT leaders had correctly predicted that there would be another military coup and that the country would return to a reign of terror. The party had advised its provincial committees to prepare for the influx of intellectuals from the cities, but without any clear indication of what should be done or when it was likely that the incident would occur.³⁶ In the event the number of students who fled into the jungle was much higher than the CPT could have expected or could accommodate, especially in the south, where hundreds of intellectuals were diverted from the north and the northeast because of the government's military operations there. Prior to this exodus, CPT activists in the jungle had had very little experience of urban intellectuals, apart from receiving a few who had come for excursions or arms training for a short period.

Obviously intellectuals, with middle class or petty bourgeois backgrounds, were very different from the CPT activists who were peasants. It was therefore likely from the beginning the urban newcomers' perceptions would clash with the long held beliefs of CPT activists in the jungle, especially the farmers who were its leaders.³⁷

The intellectuals, mostly students, had a liberal outlook. They had had greater access to literature and other sources of knowledge. The modern education system had made them more accustomed to differing points of view - particularly those who were politicised and more accustomed to debate, and to expanding, reviewing and criticising each others' opinions. Their world view was wider. As their social status was mostly petty bourgeois, they were less influenced by the Sakdina ideology, in particular with regard to the patron-client relationship. Their organisations were run democratically.³⁸ In the political struggle, their experience had been one of direct action on everything they saw as wrong or unjust in an open, largely urban environment. They were energetic, strongly motivated and ready to adopt flexible, all-out efforts and tactics.³⁹

The CPT, on the other hand, comprised veteran "professionals", habituated to underground activity and hardened by decades of struggle, which could only gradually change the balance of forces.⁴⁰ Apart from the leaders, nearly all of them were low-land rice farmers or hill swiddeners with a minimal education or none at all, who had had no experience of serious discussion. Their perceptions of social problems was limited and their intellectual potential had not been developed. Their social background enveloped and entrapped them within the Sakdina ideology. Their first affiliation to a political organisation was very likely to be to the CPT which, for several reasons which will be discussed later, was undemocratic and conservative. Recruited and trained by dogmatic cadres with the emphasis on "being red" rather than "expert", they could only just follow their leaders, without real understanding of the revolution or the ability to think

for themselves. Self-taught through their own experience, they tended to accept or refuse revolutionary theory according to whether it fitted with or ran contrary to those experiences.

It is obvious that without a strong common ideology and shared emotion, and rigorous attempts on both sides to adapt to each other, the intellectuals of the October 14 movement and the CPT activists were unlikely to work together to achieve a fruitful revolution in the long term.⁴¹

The first known major conflict between the intellectuals and the CPT in the jungle occurred in three CPT camps in Surat Thani province in the south, which contained in total around 400 students. It began just a few months after the 6 October coup, when conditions were severe, because the third region army began a series of military operations aimed at smashing CPT armed forces in the area. The conflict began when the intellectuals realised that their expectations of their comrades were unrealistic - these CPT men were simply ordinary human beings. This was followed by various disagreements - some trivial - which basically reflected the differences in social background, character and world view already mentioned. By and large, the newcomers ended up being the losers, as it was clear that the old comrades were in charge. Furthermore, their arguments were ignored, or even if they received some attention were never taken seriously. This caused tremendous frustration, in that they had to fight for democracy all over again in the jungle. Discontent among the intellectuals accumulated and showed itself in various forms. The pressure was so great that at least one young woman attempted to commit suicide. The conflict went on for several months, culminating in an almost complete separation between the intellectuals and the peasants, though they still shared the same camps and fought the same enemies. In one camp there was almost unnecessary bloodshed as the CPT armed men moved to protect the camp leader, having heard that the intellectuals were going to "stage a coup" to overthrow him.

The conflict died down in about the middle of 1977, not because its causes had really been established and resolved, but because the students had asked to move away to the north and northeast. Though their trust in CPT members was badly shaken the intellectuals in general remained committed to the revolution led by the CPT. Many of them simply rationalised the problem away by thinking that these camps were not suitable for them because they were in the guerrilla war zone. Moving to revolutionary bases, they thought they would find more favourable conditions to contribute to the revolution; the CPT there must be better. Their expectations were to be disappointed again.

Two interesting points emerged from the incident described. First, there was another camp in the same area, a smaller one with around 40 students. Surprisingly, while the conflict exploded in other camps, the situation in this camp remained calm and later, even when these students met their friends from the other camps, less than ten of them became resentful and left the area. The difference may be due to the fact that the leader of this smaller camp had been educated in a vocational school and therefore had a better understanding of how to deal with urban intellectuals. In addition, it being a small camp, the problem of food shortages was less severe and this resulted in less pressure upon everyone.

Secondly, the document drawn up by the first camp's party unit stated clearly that the conflict had its roots in three basic differences: between intellectuals and peasants; (people from) urban areas and (people from) rural areas; and leaders and followers, or party members and non-party members. Unfortunately, this extremely significant and straightforward conclusion was ignored by CPT leaders at the higher levels, or perhaps it did not reach them at all. The CPT therefore lost an opportunity to understand the potential for conflict caused by its union with urban intellectuals and to extinguish the fire when it first started.

The revolutionary bases in liberated areas were again not what the intellectuals had imagined. The CPT elsewhere was much the same in its general characteristics. Significantly, the party appeared to be much like any other organisation in Thai society in that it was plagued with multiple problems waiting to surface and explode to cause damage. In fact, the CPT had had some similar internal conflicts before. These conflicts were not always limited to a small group of the party's leading members; ideological or personal, the conflict usually extended to the rank and file as well. However, they were, at most, regional conflicts and had a minimal effect on the movement as a whole.⁴²

The conflicts between the intellectuals and the CPT might initially have been personal and involved only the rank and file, but ultimately they became fundamental and ideological, focusing on the CPT leadership. The nature of the problem of integration went far beyond matters of organisation and technique; it concerned vital issues of policy.⁴³ As the intellectuals were everywhere where the CPT operated, the nature of the conflict was national as well as international. Just as the arrival of the intellectuals had greatly enhanced the strength of the CPT and the revolution, so the conflict which ended with the departure of the young, energetic and well-educated brains of the nation caused severe damage to the CPT, in a way which had never happened before. Because the CPT could not restrict the conflict to the intellectuals within the movement, the conflict created a nationwide "crisis of confidence" among all those who had trusted the CPT to lead the struggle for a better society. The CPT leadership itself became divided. Rank and file members of the movement, including sympathisers in the cities and abroad, were confused. In less than five years, the CPT had lost most of the influence and mass support it had struggled to achieve for four decades of its history.

FOOTNOTES

1. Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit.
2. ibid.
3. Yuk Sri-ariya (pseud), 'Rebel's Memoir - A Memoir to Challenge Sacredness of the CPT', 1980, p.46.
4. For more details on the student uprising of 14 October 1973 see Wittayakorn Chiangkoon et al. 'The Thai Student Movement' in Thai (1975), also the same title by Thanet Charoenmuang (1974), footnoted in Wedel, Y., The Thai Radicals and the Communist Party, 1983; or see Ponpirom pp. 158-167 which gives details of conditions before the uprising and the 14 October Movement's historical role.
5. A Brief Introduction of the History of the CPT, op.cit., p.166 also mentions the impact of the international revolutionary tide including the Great Proletarian Revolution in China, on Thai youth and the students.
6. Girling, op.cit., p.255
7. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.156-157
8. Ibid., pp.158-166
9. Ibid., p.166
10. Gen. Saiyud Kerdphol, the then director of the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC), reveals that in 1967 more than 100 communists, 20 of them high-ranking CPT cadres, were arrested in the Bangkok area. Among them were three Central Committee members, see Saiyud, p.48.
11. Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit., p.287
12. Morell & Chaiananda, p.161, say that only 200 or so student activists who adopted the communist approach arduously worked for their cause, and p.290, says that the figure was 100 full-time activists in late 1975. This figure is plausible for early 1974, but certainly by 1975-76, the activists in a single average university alone were more than that.
13. Girling, op.cit., p.272; Ponpirom, op.cit., p.166. For example, when one group of students during the 14 October incident marched to the Royal Palace, Thirayuth Bunmi, a student leader, accused his colleague, Seksan Prasertkun, of being a communist for having directed this action (Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit., p.287).
14. Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit., p.287
15. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.175
16. For more details, see "The Development of Dogmatic Revolutionary Ideas in the Student Movement" in Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.175-180
17. Ibid., p.176

18. Wedel, op.cit., pp.1-4
19. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.175-180 and Morell and Chaiananda, op.cit., pp.161-164, 172-176
20. Questions raised by Morell & Chaiananda, p.290, should be repeated: for example, 'What led the student leaders to shift so suddenly from their democratic beliefs to an adherence to Marxism/Maoism?', 'Did they take up arms mainly to protect themselves or were they so young and stupid that they were easily lured by the CPT?' Moreover, many students who joined the student movement later had no direct experience of the 1973 uprising.

The main weaknesses of Wedel's analysis lie in the fact that firstly, as she admits, she has no first-hand contact with the communists, and certainly no personal experience within the student movement or the CPT. Secondly, her analysis is based wholly on the interviews of 22 informants who had just left the CPT. Her methodology has two major disadvantages. On the one hand, it denies her access to wider, comparative information from other sources, which can be revealing and can reduce any possible bias. On the other hand, as she herself recognizes, the interviews of these informants cannot amount to a representative sample of the estimated 3000 'radicals' who joined the CPT in the jungle. In addition, her definition of the key technical terms - 'radicals', 'communists' and 'Thai Marxists' are hopelessly confused and misleading. For proper use and analysis of Thai Marxism, see Reynolds & Lysa.

21. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.174
22. Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit., p.288
23. Conversation with a student activist in the jungle, south of Thailand, 1978
24. Three intellectuals were accused by a right-wing newspaper in Bangkok of being CPT members who left the student movement, and this allegation was proved to be correct as they indirectly revealed their identity in the jungle. The CPT also had members of the Democratic Youth League of Thailand (DYLT) working within the movement, though the overall number of 'real' CPT cadres were not as high as government agents claimed.
25. Morell & Chaiananda, p.175, suggest that the students felt that power had passed into the people's hand and another coup d'état was simply not possible. This suggestion is unfounded at least after early 1976. Intensifying attacks from all shades of the right suggested that the only question was whether the coup would take place sooner or later.
26. Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit., p. 174 - interview by the authors in September 1975.
27. Ponpirom, op.cit., p. 177.
28. Somchai Rakwichit 'Problems of Thai Internal Security' Southeast Asian Affairs, 1978, p. 291, quoted by Girling, op.cit., p. 274.
29. Ibid.

30. Wedel, op.cit., p. 141, suggests that it is quite possible that the students understated their desire for revenge and overstated their hope for revolutionary victory with the CPT. However, by saying that they felt they were forced to join the CPT, she may mislead readers into thinking that student activists generally had no alternative, which is not true.
31. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp. 179, 199.
32. An example of the general attitude towards the revolutionary movement and their relationship with their parents may be seen in the letter of a young university student, written in August 1977 which was captured by government armed forces at a CPT camp, see Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit., pp. 298-299.
33. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.190-196
34. Girling, op.cit., pp.257, 260 (map)
35. A senior CIA man in Thailand predicted the CPT's victory in five years time ('The CPT's 36 tears and changes', Siam Nikorn, 12 December 1978, quoted in Ponpirom). Dr Puey Ungpakorn, a former rector of Thammasart University who was in exile in Britain, believed it could be achieved in only three years (a message broadcast over VOPT in 1977). A CPT Central Committee member gave a less optimistic figure of around twelve years in conversation with the author in the jungle in the south in 1977.
36. Conversation with Comrade Sri (Chamnarn Banjongkriang), a provincial committee member in Surat Thani province in the south, 1976. He was later promoted to become a Central Committee member at the Fourth Party Congress, 1982.
37. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.203, quoted from 'An interview with Wichai Bumrungrit', Tawan Mai, 2 February 1981.
38. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.198
39. Girling, op.cit., p.276
40. Ibid.
41. The author does not separate ordinary CPT followers from their leaders because most of these leaders, apart from some of the Central Committee, were peasants anyway. Though some intellectuals claimed that they had no conflict with the majority they behaved differently when they were promoted to be leaders.
42. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.77-82
43. Girling, op.cit., p.277

CHAPTER THREE

**The Crisis
Who is to Blame?**

... I found out that the democracy that I struggled for during my time in the city does not exist in the revolutionary movement either. It is a pity that I have to struggle for it again in the jungle...

Seksan Prasertkun, 1980¹

... The splitting from the party reflected the fact that class struggle in the party was so real and so intense that those who were still influenced by the old society had to leave the party...

A CPT Cadre, 1979²

With differences in perception and clashes from the early months of union, why was the split between the intellectuals and the CPT delayed until 1980? In a major document following the Fourth Party Congress in 1982, the CPT pointed out three main factors: international circumstances, especially the invasion of Kampuchea by the Vietnamese and the war between Vietnam and China; the change in the government's counter-insurgency policy from emphasis on military means to an emphasis on political means reflected in the prime minister's order number 66/23 (23 is 2523 B.E. or 1980 A.D.); and defects within the CPT. This conclusion is similar to the analyses of other scholars and observers.

International circumstances

The conflicts among the socialist states of Southeast Asia which exploded after December 1978 with the invasion of Kampuchea by the Vietnamese, and later on the invasion of Vietnam by the Chinese, had a great impact on the CPT.

Before these conflicts, the CPT had managed to gain the support of the CCP and all the communist parties in Indochina.

However, when the conflict broke out between a pro-Soviet Vietnam and a pro-China Khmer Rouge, resulting in the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea in early 1979, the CPT decided to take sides - the Chinese side, as might be expected. The CPT certainly tried hard to avoid being dragged into the dangerous conflict between Vietnam and China. Though most material support had come from China, support in the form of military training from Vietnam and permission to use territory for supply routes and camp sites in Laos had also been vital to the CPT's survival, and to the expansion of the revolutionary war, especially in the north and northeast. This had become even more important after Laos came under communist control in April 1975.³

When it came to the point that a decision had to be made, the CPT leadership chose the Chinese side as it was clearly pro-China anyway.⁴ However, the CPT delayed open criticism of the Vietnamese for many months. Unlike the Burmese and the Malayan communist parties - who broadcast radio denunciations of the Vietnamese from China as early as 14 December 1978 - the VOPT refrained from comment. The first indirect criticism was broadcast on 7 June 1979 by Sri Intaparti, a committee member of the CCPDF (and not of the CPT itself).⁵

Then the Vietnamese and the Laotians abruptly cut their relations with the CPT in 1979. The CPT camps in Laos had to be evacuated within a month, some to China and some back into Thai territory. Consequently, material support from China through Laos was totally cut off. In fact, the relationship between the CPT and the Vietnamese had been deteriorating for some years, since the CPT had aligned itself with China while the Vietnamese aligned themselves more and more with Moscow. The CPT had stopped sending cadres for training in Vietnam some years before 1979, and prior to that the training courses were limited to military aspects; all political courses taking place in China.⁶ A CPT central committee member claimed that the CPT itself never broke off its relationship with the Vietnamese and Lao communists. He revealed that the Vietnamese had proposed to help liberate

the sixteen northeastern provinces of Thailand. There was to be a joint command, but the Vietnamese troops would be under Vietnamese control and would remain in Thailand after the operation was complete. The CPT leadership refused this proposal immediately, fearful of facing the same situation as existed in Kampuchea. The Vietnamese were therefore angry and cut links.⁷

The loss of camps in Laos and material support from China made jungle life and revolutionary work in the areas concerned much more difficult than before. It also widely affected CPT activists' morale, making them confused and causing them to lose faith in socialism.⁸

Changes in China following Mao's death in 1976 and the Polish Communist Party's clamp down on the Solidarity movement had similar disastrous effects. In Poland, the communist party oppressed its own working class and banned an independent worker movement which had tried to struggle for the Polish people's benefit. In China, the leadership of the CCP changed hands so frequently that Thai communists did not know who they should believe. Worse still, the Chinese seemed to be becoming more nationalistic and reduced their commitment to internationalism. They were then increasingly interested in modernizing their country and creating a peaceful situation in neighbouring areas, while at the same time being strongly anti-Soviet and anti-Vietnam. They changed their foreign policy to make friends with any government that might contribute to their programme of modernization or could hinder the expansion of Soviet and Vietnamese influence, instead of helping communist parties in Southeast Asia.⁹

Apparently, the CCP sought co-operation with the Thai government to secure China's material support for the Khmer Rouge on the Thai border. The Chinese interest in making friends with the Thai government was visibly increasing. Even Vice-Premier Ji Peng Fei stated that Thai communists should set up a united front with the government to meet the threat of the Vietnamese.¹⁰ Observers believed that the CCP's concern with its own

national interests overrode its commitment to internationalist solidarity and finally led to the abrupt closure on 11 July, 1979 of the VOPT - the most important propaganda and communication instrument of the CPT - which was based in China's Yunnan province.

The damage caused by the closure of the VOPT was tremendous. For many years it had been the only reliable means whereby CPT activists and sympathizers everywhere in Thailand obtained up-to-date information on the situation, with analysis and general guidelines. It was also the means of promoting an alternative revolutionary culture, and perhaps more importantly, it created a sense of unity among CPT followers. Realising the damage the closure had inflicted, the CPT started sending news bulletins using Morse transmission, and later attempted to set up radio stations in Thai territory, but without success.

These external changes exposed the defects of the CPT on ideological and policy issues. They showed that the CPT leadership, whether it submitted itself to the CCP or not, had no idea how to devise its own independent, Thai-oriented foreign and internal policies. Literally, it just "followed the Chinese's bottom". CPT followers, especially the intellectuals who were prone to be sceptical of the CPT, and other independent-minded CPT sympathizers, started to review the relationship between the CCP and CPT, and made a strong critique of the Chinese and the CPT leadership.¹² The CPT, instead of quickly distancing itself from China and creating a nationalist image, tried to defend the CCP's standpoint at all costs, making the situation worse. Many of the intellectuals who had remained on the sidelines in the conflict between the CPT leadership and their own colleagues began to be disillusioned and joined the criticism of the CPT leadership. The intellectuals finally concluded with confidence that if the CPT leadership dogmatically followed the CCP, no matter who was in power in China, this would not enhance the CPT's prestige on international platforms or contribute to the success of the national revolution. This incident created an

excellent opportunity for the intellectuals to begin a thorough ideological examination of the CPT leadership, which, more importantly, gradually spread to other Thais in Thailand and abroad.

The Change in the Government's Counter-Insurgency Policy

There had been disagreement among those in government responsible for counter-insurgency for a long time. In the past, those who preferred using only military means had always won the debate and dominated government policy and action against the Thai communists. When the first organisation to deal directly with the communists, the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOS), later renamed the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), was set up in 1965, General Prapas Charusathira, the then Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Army Commander-in-Chief, reportedly boasted arrogantly that the government would crush the communists in six months.¹³ However, the argument for using political means before military means gradually gained momentum.¹⁴

After many years of the government blindly setting up armed counter-insurgency forces which it could not completely control, and of indiscriminate action against Thais whom the authorities, or rather the soldiers in the field, suspected of being communists, more and more people came over to the CPT. The measures forced many innocent Thais who had no idea about social revolution to join the CPT. Since the first "gunshot" on 7 August 1965 the CPT had grown to become a formidable threat to the Thai government and army by the late 1970s. The number of guerrillas rose to between 8,000-20,000 and the CPT had influence in thousands of villages with a total population of more than three million.¹⁵

In fact after 1965, each time the military took over the government, the communist threat was cited as a major reason for the coup. However, when one looks at government policy, there is no evidence to indicate that the government was really trying to stop the insurgency. No counter insurgency

policy was included in its policy statements. After 1973 most governments were more sincere in their attempts to solve the insurgency problem, for they had begun to perceive the CPT as a real threat. Government leaders gradually admitted that military suppression alone could not stop the people from supporting the CPT, and they tried instead to use political measures. The ISOC was improved to function more effectively. It was General Prem Tinsulanda, the then commander of the second region army, who pushed the policy of 'political before military means' so hard that it was finally adopted.¹⁶

The failures of the extreme right-wing Premier Thanin Graiwichian, which had accelerated the expansion of CPT armed revolution, led to another coup d'état which brought in General Kriangsak Chamananda as Prime Minister, followed by the return of the country to parliamentary democracy. Top government and military leaders realised that ruthless suppression had pushed thousands of intellectuals and others to the CPT. So the governments of Kriangsak and later Prem started to persuade these intellectuals to return to the cities. The shift of policy culminated in the imposition of the Prime Minister's order number 66/23 in April 1980 which stated that government officials should use every available measure through every medium - news, psychology, propaganda, the promotion of democracy, the removal of all kinds of exploitation, and others - in order to win people back from the communists. This order included an amnesty for communists who wanted to give themselves up. At the same time, students were allowed to re-enrol in the universities. This order offered an opportunity for intellectuals, peasants and others to leave the jungle, especially the students who had entered into conflict with the CPT - an opportunity which anyone who had joined the CPT earlier did not have. Many intellectuals admitted that if there had been no amnesty, they would not have left; feeling uncomfortable with the CPT was better than being arrested by another form of dictatorship.¹⁷

Ponpirom concludes that the shift in government counter-insurgency policy was the result not only of the lessons learned from experience, but also of comments and advice from former CPT cadres who had either been arrested or had surrendered to the authorities. It was also in accordance with the human rights policy of the US government under President Carter.¹⁸

Defects of the CPT¹⁹

In 'A Report from the Fourth Party Congress', 30 June 1982, apart from general analysis of the world political situation and the Thai revolutionary situation, the CPT's spokesman admitted to some defects and mistakes made by the party: "... the party implemented some extremist policies and operations and some weak points ... though the party's general policy and the way the party handled general problems were right, the implementation of the policy and some of the tactics that had been used at certain times were mistaken, inflexible and out-of-date. This was because of a lack of follow-up and discontinuities in forecasting the situation. The study of various aspects of the problems was not deep and extensive enough. The style of study and work was influenced by a subjectivism which did not correspond to reality. As regards democratic centralism in the party, there was too much emphasis on centralism. The expansion of democracy and mass line practices was not enough. All of these factors led to confusion, chaos and some adverse effects on the revolutionary movement."²⁰

This was the first self-criticism that the CPT had made available to its followers in general in decades, and later the media revealed it to the public. Though, as will be shown, it was spectacular by the CPT's standards, in the eyes of the intellectuals it remained too broad and too vague. And vague it was. Certain fundamental errors within the CPT were ignored or concealed, and the ones revealed were half-hearted and lacked any clear examples.

(1) The Lack of Autonomy and Independence

One of the severest criticisms of the CPT was its domination by the Chinese in many aspects.²¹ The international changes that caused so much confusion and conflict between the intellectuals and the CPT stemmed from changes in China which served to highlight Chinese domination of the CPT.²²

This statement may be read in two ways. Firstly, the CPT was dominated by the CCP, physically and ideologically. Secondly, the CPT leadership was dominated by people who were Chinese or Chinese-oriented. A CPT central committee member denied the first charge, claiming that it was the CPT leadership itself that had adhered to China. There is no solid evidence to confirm or refute this revelation or similar accusations made by defectors.²³

However, it is clear that the CCP has had a strong influence, particularly in ideological terms, over the CPT since the founding of the Thai party (see Chapter One); "the birth of the CPT was conceived from the womb of the CCP".²⁴ The early communists in Thailand never made an extensive survey of the social, cultural, economic or political characteristics of Thai society. The first analysis of Thai society was a mere copy of Mao's analysis of Chinese society, and this became the model for the CPT's theoretical works. It also resulted in the absence of a clear revolutionary strategy when the CPT was founded.²⁵ This was, unfortunately, not detected by the CPT leadership, and seven years later, the CCP's victory stamped a seal of approval on the virtue of Mao's ideas and the Chinese style of revolution.

The CPT leadership from that period - in fact virtually the same group of people held power in the CPT for more than thirty years - seems to have been stuck in time. Its clock stopped in 1949 so that it failed to notice the socio-economic developments that occurred rapidly after the end of the second World War. Mao's thought and China remained the unquestioned guiding light of the Thai revolution. What the CPT leadership did was to fit the

Thai situation at any moment into the dogmatic Maoist theoretical framework. Any new situation was dealt with by consultation of Mao's work on a similar theme. When a policy or operation failed, CPT cadres always presumed that the problem lay in the application of Mao's thought, not in the thought itself.²⁶

To learn from the experience of a fraternal party was not wrong, but this did not require that the process of learning be restricted to just one party - the CCP in the case of the CPT - and a party which was regarded as possessing the unquestionable, ultimate truth. In the case of the CPT, this was tantamount to ignorance of the Marxist-Leninist theories the CPT so adored. Following China so blindly, the CPT was deprived not only of the opportunity to learn seriously from the successes and failures of other communist and liberation movements, but also from developing the ability to stand on its own two feet.

According to some student leaders, when questioned about the virtue of following China all the time, the CPT leader gave a revealing explanation: "following China was the same as following Marxism".²⁷ "Most of us (the CPT leaders) graduated from the Marxist-Leninist Institute in Peking, so we have been doing what we learned from that institute, setting up a form of revolution like the one we saw in China."²⁸

The CPT not only admired the Chinese revolution, but also regarded China itself with pride and loyalty. It did not criticize China but defended it against those who opposed it.²⁹ The CPT tried hard to follow China in every step and established mechanisms to keep in touch with, or rather submit to, a system devised by Peking to keep the CPT in line. Each time China changed its policy the top CPT leaders were summoned to courses to be indoctrinated in the new line. When the Gang of Four was in power, the CPT expressed its brand of radical Maoism. When the Gang fell the CPT changed. When Mao's ideology was changed by the new Chinese leaders, the CPT leadership began to criticise Mao as well.³¹

The intellectuals attacked the CPT leadership on the grounds that it was Chinese by birth, language and culture. These leaders thus unconsciously promoted Chinese interests, and as they held positions of power in the party they had a decisive influence on all levels of ideas over the rank and file of the party, and ultimately made the whole party serve the Chinese government's interests rather than that of the Thai people.³² A politician who used to belong to the CPT stated that he sometimes thought that the CPT existed so that China could have something to bargain over with the Thai government.³³

According to Wedel, the CPT's dependence on China was not limited to ideology, but was strongly reinforced by a flow of supplies and money.³⁴ However, one cannot generalise, but must consider the CPT in each region. It is true that historically the CPT in the north and northeast received most of its revolutionary equipment from China. But this was not true of the CPT in the south and west, who relied wholly on their own efforts from the beginning. The CPT in the latter regions seized guns and everything they wanted from the government and, especially in the south, acquired so much money that for some years it supported other regions.³⁵ Wedel's claim that China gave financial support to the CPT through Chinese merchants established legitimately in Thailand is a doubtful one, though it echoes the view of the government. Sympathy among Sino-Thais for the CPT is likely to have been a personal matter rather than under the direct influence of China, which was far away, and had no common interest.

In the north and northeast, however, the CPT relied heavily on Chinese material support. Historically, China once sent troops to help liberate an area in the north.³⁶ Moreover, it was said that since weapons from China were of higher quality and more suitable for guerrilla warfare than the American weapons deployed by the Thai Army, and since Chinese weapons seemed available in unlimited number, the Thai guerrillas in these regions developed

a habit of preferring Chinese weapons. They did not attempt to seize weapons from government personnel and whatever they did acquire that way they left unused.

Finally, there were the CPT radio stations in Yunnan and the CPT 'capital' in northern Laos. This capital, as Wirat Sakchirapapong, a Socialist Party Central Committee member, has stated, comprised hospitals (at least six) children's schools, the CCPDF office, the research office, training camps, storehouses and other buildings, and could not possibly have existed without enormous help from China. Some students estimated that China provided the CPT with about 600 tons of supplies of a year, excluding rice, of which around 1,000 tons a year was brought in, while the Pol Pot regime was in power in Phnom Penh.

Dependence on China, Vietnam and Laos for supplies handicapped the CPT. The loss of this support constituted a major set back for the CPT.³⁷

The CPT's Perception of Thai Society

In the earlier discussion, it was shown that the CPT had never thoroughly investigated Thai conditions. Perceiving that Thai society was similar to China, the CPT leadership simply adopted the Chinese model of society, changed names to Thai and claimed that this was a Marxist analysis of Thai society.

According to the CPT, Thai society had been, since the Bowring Treaty in 1855, "a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society", and had remained significantly unchanged for more than 120 years.

A student leader has said that because the CPT leadership tended to see Mao's theories of national democratic revolution as a general truth which they fitted to Thai society, adding leftist ideas from the Chinese cultural revolution, Thai revolutionaries lacked the opportunity to criticise their

revolutionary theory. In more than ten years of revolutionary war, there had been little or no attempt to adapt revolutionary theory to the changing environment of Thai society.³⁸

On the other hand, the CPT was not equipped to undertake any such analysis. Being underground, most of the CPT leadership spent its times in the jungle or abroad, and did not know what was really happening. Conducting social research was virtually impossible. There is also no evidence that the CPT contacted intellectuals in the city to undertake that kind of research for it. Its vision of Thai society was completely blinkered. In fact, the rank and file of the CPT, especially the cadres who did propaganda and organisational work in the villages, had found many aberrations in CPT revolutionary theory, but they did not bother to question their superiors because it did not affect their work. For example, in the south the majority of people were not landless or poor farmers, and the major problem at the time was not one of landownership but of production and marketing, which was also the case in the northeast and to a lesser extent in the north. Figures show that many of those who rented land owned some land themselves. This situation certainly differed from that in China before the revolution.

The Thai social structure was in fact different from, and more complex than, the picture the CPT and earlier communist movements in Thailand had found 40-50 years before. The class structure of Thailand had changed considerably in that period, notably with a marked fall in the peasant population and the growth of a middle class and factory workers due to the rapid expansion of the service and manufacturing sectors. However, the CPT stuck to Chinese classifications. It tended to lump together people whom it thought came from the same class, and failed to look at and judge individuals according to their background, ideals and actions.³⁹

In Thailand peasants constitute the majority of the population. For the CPT then, the peasants, being exploited, were the principal force and major component of the armed forces of the national democratic revolution under the

correct leadership of the proletariat. Yet peasants could not be a leading force due to their social character as small producers, economically backward and widely scattered while orthodox Marxism classifies the proletariat as the most progressive revolutionary force. An outside element can lead peasants to rebel only when it can convince them that they would benefit more by supporting or joining the rebellion than resisting it. To put it bluntly, the peasants are likely to be on the winning side and sometimes against the losing one.⁴⁰

The CPT was successful in mobilizing peasants in remote areas and among hill tribe minorities in mountainous areas because they lived in peripheral parts where state power barely reached them, and because of the long and consistent efforts of the CPT in working with them, they had gradually been convinced that the CPT could help them to obtain a better life. Furthermore, it is clear that the abuse of power and brutality by government officials and military personnel was a major factor in peasants going over to the CPT, since these factors posed immediate threats to their security. This contributed greatly to the CPT's success in expanding the armed struggle into the heartlands and lowlands of the country. Peasants are always rational in deciding whether or not to revolt, whether to join or leave the CPT.⁴¹

In the south, for instance, most of the peasants in the CPT's classification, were middle peasants with no immediate threat to their subsistence, engaged increasingly in market-oriented production. It was the government's indiscriminate counter-insurgency measures, notoriously the "shove (from helicopters) down mountains" and "burn in red drums" actions⁴² that forced them to join the CPT for two obvious reasons; to seek refuge and to get revenge.

The CPT's great reliance on peasants made it vulnerable from the beginning. This was made worse by the fact that the CPT did not pay enough attention to organising the Thai workers. Tienchai Wongchaisuwan concluded that the CPT has not been the vanguard of the working class, not even the

political party of this class. The CPT's urban work was aimed significantly at intellectuals, especially students, because these were easily recruited. The CPT was in fact a peasant party and was dominated by a Narodnic tendency.⁴³

When this serious mistake concerning its perception of Thai society was raised by intellectuals and began to discredit the CPT's central ideological framework, the CPT could no longer ignore it or insist on its correctness, especially since a whole range of Thai scholars, particularly political economists, had now joined the debate. The CPT relayed some of the arguments to its followers in the jungle but omitted the ones that ran strongly contrary to its own line. Local CPT leaders also tried to censor articles and magazines arguing against the party. When the debate among the intellectuals died down a few years later, because no one could offer a clear picture of Thai society, the CPT was left in confusion.⁴⁴

The Strategy and Tactics of the Revolution⁴⁵

To have a sharp and effective strategy and tactics for the revolution, a communist party must have a clear picture of the society in which it is conducting the revolution. With a rigid and outdated analysis of Thai society - a barely amended version of Mao's analysis of China in the 1920s and 1930s - the CPT could not go forward on its own and survive a crisis when it arose. The strategy employed was very likely wrong.

The major aspects of the CPT's revolutionary strategy in this period of national democratic revolution were to identify:- 1) the targets of the revolution (imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism), 2) the forces of the revolution (the proletariat, peasants, and petty bourgeoisie as secure and permanent allies - these were the leading forces of the revolution; the national bourgeoisie and all patriotic and democratic forces as temporary allies - these were the supporting forces of the revolution that

may join the revolution and may change their mind, attitude and standpoint as the revolution develops), and 3) the direction of the revolution (armed struggle, using the countryside to encircle the towns).

It must be stressed that the CPT started its movement in urban areas; it was founded in Bangkok and propagated itself among workers. The CPT did not begin to move to rural areas until 1961, when its Third Party Congress adopted a resolution to prepare for armed struggle. Undoubtedly, an important reason for the CPT's retreat into rural areas was severe suppression by the government.⁴⁶ The CPT's experience in urban areas was marked by the loss of many members and leaders, especially in the mass sweeps of 1958, 1967 and 1972.⁴⁷ The CPT had done minimal organisational work among workers and intellectuals before the 1973 popular uprising.

In addition, the victory of the Chinese revolution confirmed the success of armed revolution under the 'countryside encircles towns' strategy.⁴⁸ The CPT leadership therefore gradually became convinced that the Thai revolution would never succeed by peaceful means through a parliamentary system and that the emphasis on armed struggle among rural peasants was inevitable. Because the CPT had followed the CCP from its beginnings, instead of devising its own strategy, it simply adopted an orthodox Maoist strategy without considering the differences between the two countries.⁴⁹

In 1979 when the intellectuals began to challenge the CPT, its strategy was also rigorously attacked, particularly by Tienchai Wangchaisuwan.⁵⁰ He stressed that in copying the Chinese revolutionary strategy, the CPT ignored or overlooked several of Mao's notes to the effects that the Chinese strategy was formed on the specific characteristics of the Chinese revolutionary war; revolution was not a product for export, and peasant movements and wars in Chinese history could not be compared with those in any other country. He then argued that though there were indeed some similarities between the Thai and Chinese revolutions, several conditions were different.

Firstly, the capitalist economy had expanded more into Thai rural areas than it had in the case of China; it was changing continuously and had not spread evenly over the country. Thai rural areas were dependent on urban areas economically, politically, and culturally, and therefore could not exist independently from the towns. Consequently, the CPT could not set up revolutionary bases, or areas of people's state power, in the densely-populated lowlands. Those set up among the hill tribes in the northern mountains could not be compared economically or culturally with the areas of state power. They simply could not be centres of a 'new' economy and culture, as the CPT proudly claimed.

Secondly, Thailand is much smaller than China. The ruling class can manoeuvre its suppressive forces around making it difficult for the CPT's armed forces to expand without being prematurely cut down.

Thirdly, Thai peasants had never experienced a revolutionary war before. Mobilizing peasants was therefore much more difficult, although there were some favourable economic conditions. As a result, the CPT received little support for its revolutionary war. Conditions in Thai rural areas were more complex and less uniform than in China (as described earlier).

Finally, the only suitable areas for armed struggle were the densely-forested or mountainous areas, or areas bordered by country already under communist control. In other words, the geographical setting of rural Thailand was not so favourable to armed struggle.

Tienchai then argued that an urban strategy was extremely important, as these areas were the economic, political and cultural centre. They might provide the CPT with strong economic support and with strong, active revolutionary forces. The CPT was quite wrong to assume that the influence of the October 14 Movement had been totally destroyed and that urban work was impossible. The CPT had committed a stupid error in leading peasants to raise the armed struggle when the situation was not yet ripe, and when the mass base was not strong enough and not ready for such a struggle. The CPT

had also made a serious mistake in underrating the political struggle, and overemphasizing military operations, theorizing that victory in the armed struggle is in itself political propaganda.⁵¹

It can be argued that although Tienchai's criticism has some merit, it goes too far in certain points. Kanok believes that the question is not whether the CPT's armed revolution under the stated strategy was applicable to Thailand, but rather what the limits of that strategy were, and whether or not the CPT had another complementary strategy.⁵²

The first gunshot on 7 August 1965 in the northeast was in fact an accident. A police lieutenant-colonel was seriously injured and a CPT armed man was killed, when a police patrol unit came across a CPT propaganda unit. This incident caught the headlines in all the national newspapers and the CPT Politburo took this chance to "embark on armed struggle in every zone where the necessary conditions existed".⁵³ In fact, the CPT as a whole was by no means in a condition to start open armed struggle, and before this incident the CPT had ordered its forces to avoid fighting by every means possible. The Politburo's resolution on armed struggle in September 1965 was therefore an abrupt change of tactics, which - one has to agree with Tienchai - was altogether unwise. As a result, it aroused the government's interest and waves of military suppression, which in turn made the CPT's work generally more difficult. The CPT later had to spend much time defending its bases, mostly among the hill tribe people without being able to undertake mass propaganda effectively among the lowland Thai peasants, which in turn isolated these bases.

Nonetheless, armed struggle in rural areas was possible and it expanded slowly to many places, whereas urban work was repeatedly reduced. As a Central Committee member said: "we carried on armed struggle simply because it worked!". It could be claimed that if the CPT had not had this strategy, it is unlikely that its revolution would have expanded - it might not even have survived. Simply to state that efforts should have been made quietly in

the towns first, and once large sections of the urban population were under control, the revolutionary movement could have moved out easily to influence the villages, as some intellectuals have argued,⁵⁴ is unrealistic. This assumption dangerously underestimates the ruling class's strength vis a vis its enemies in urban areas. Historically, the scale of the CPT's losses in urban areas was much greater than that in rural areas.

At the same time, the success of its armed struggle diverted the CPT's attention from other forms of struggle. Its strategy states that "armed struggle is the major form of struggle used in coordination with other forms of struggle". Its other urban activities were not at all independent, but merely a part of the rural armed struggle. Urban activities were under no single command, but were divided into supporting roles in each region of the areas of armed struggle. During the 'period of democracy' (1973-76), the CPT cadres in the cities, especially Bangkok, could not cope with the rapid expansion and development of student and worker movements. Because the CPT placed greater stress on intellectuals, workers with weak unions fought mainly on their own, only a minority receiving help from the students.

Another tendency of the CPT was to overemphasise the use of violence. CPT activists sometimes killed government personnel who had not unnecessarily caused harm to people, for example traffic policemen. The setting up of goals as to which "enemies" should be killed occurred everywhere as Tienchai reveals.⁵⁵ The most alarming incident occurred in the southern region of the northeast, on the Kampuchean border, where the local CPT, trained and supported by the Khmer Rouge, began using Khmer Rouge style revolutionary terror not only against government personnel but also villagers. Large areas were declared war zones and villagers were told either to join the struggle by moving into CPT camps inside Kampuchea or risk being killed. This quite unreasonable and excessive violence upset the students, who in general supported armed struggle but wanted to keep killing and acts of terrorism to a minimum.

(2) Conservatism and Inefficiency within the CPT

The CPT grew up in Thai society which had long been dominated by Sakdina ideology. The starting point of the Sakdina period is still uncertain, but it is widely accepted that it went back as far as the Ayudhya period (1350-1767). Again, its terminal date is debatable. Many commentators have claimed that it ended with the 1932 revolution. However, although the fully fledged system does not exist anymore, its ideology, sometimes known as the "remnants of the Sakdina system", still linger on, even though Thailand imported capitalist ideology in the twentieth century.⁵⁶

The significant principle of the ideology of Sakdina is a hierarchy of social relations based on inequality as the natural order. To some extent Buddhism was manipulated away from its pure, doctrinal form to serve Sakdina ideology. More importantly, Sakdina implies a patron-client attitude in all relationships among the Thais. This attitude still exists strongly today, particularly within the bureaucratic system.

While the bureaucracy expanded, the Sakdina attitudes of bureaucrats created resentment at the village level where many government officials behaved like masters of the people.⁵⁸ The police were equally bad. Instead of guaranteeing the security of villagers, they were themselves 'trouble makers' or 'social robbers', as villagers called them. Popular resentment was increased by government counter-insurgency measures which were employed indiscriminately against suspected persons, sometimes all the men in a village. By comparison CPT activists were usually well-disciplined. They were selected, where possible, from those who shared a common cultural, ethnic and kinship background with the local people. The peasants, who had Sakdina attitudes of submission inbred in them, therefore turned against government personnel to a relationship with CPT activists and the party itself which became a new source of patronage and security.⁵⁹

After joining the CPT, the majority of these followers preferred to follow orders rather than to analyse things themselves. This attitude seems contradictory to the concept of a communist party, but in practice it was not. Having been founded under the guidance of the Comintern, the CPT adopted the Bolsheviks' framework in its construction. The party was seen as the vanguard and the highest class organisation of the proletariat. The CPT therefore adopted a patronizing attitude towards the peasants, petty bourgeoisie and even the proletariat, who were themselves incapable of independently developing political consciousness.⁶⁰ In addition, ideological competence should have been the criterion for recruitment and promotion among the party's active followers, or at least among party members. However, in reality the CPT was more like a mass party or a big family than a vanguard party. More often than not, recruitment was not undertaken on the basis of a recruit's political standpoint or personal qualities, such as life style or confidence in the party and revolution, as Kanok claims, but rather on various weaker grounds.⁶¹

A new recruit was often a friend or a relative of an existing member. This in turn created networks of family ties among CPT followers. For those who were not relatives, the ties were likely to be those of a patron-client relationship. This unequal relationship existed on two levels: between the party and its followers as a whole, and between certain CPT cadres and their recruits. CPT cadres stood higher in the CPT hierarchy and newcomers tended to feel subordinate. At the same time, CPT members or activists were subordinate to their leaders of a higher level - the people whom they called Jadtang. This is not to say that joining the CPT did not offer anything positive to the life of the new recruit apart from being part of a revolutionary force. For many of the peasants, it provided their only chance of improving themselves and their status in society, of having access to learning - not only reading and writing but also technical skills such as nursing -and, above all, a chance to participate in politics.⁶³

Tandrup believes that the CPT acknowledged the immediate importance of patron-client relations and that the party considered them undesirable in the long term.⁶⁴ If this is so, the CPT did nothing effective to change this pattern.

When criticizing the CPT leadership for being under the CCP's control, Tienchai says that this was done through the most influential member of the Politburo, Wirat Angkathaworn, a Chinese who was in command of the political and organisational work of the party. Wirat, according to Tienchai, had looknong (clients) and grandchildren in control of the party centre's medical and theoretical units, of the united front office, and of seven out of eight CPT military battalions. Moreover, these Chinese expanded their links and organisation among their relatives.⁶⁵ In Surat Thani and Nakorn Srithammarat provinces in the south, nepotism resulting from family ties and patron-client relations with the Jongit family, especially by Jit Jongit, a provincial committee member, was notorious.

This sort of relationship also went hand in hand with the traditional Thai concept of Bunkhun (roughly speaking, an individual's gratitude). Normally when CPT activists spoke about their relationship with the party, the PLAT or depersonalized jodtang, no specific names were mentioned. However, many of them were in fact tied to those depersonalized organisations through certain patrons. The bunkhun obligation to the party, the PLAT or jadtong was felt towards cadres, not the organisation.

These conservative values and attitudes cost the CPT dearly. According to Bunkong Toemsuk, a defector, personal motives apart, the final push that caused a guerrilla to give himself up was often the death or defection of his group leader. When a guerrilla decided that he had been "fooled" by the man who recruited him or when an admired and respected leader was killed, he would feel no moral compunction about leaving the jungle.⁶⁶ The author's personal experience in the south was very similar, especially concerning the defection of hundreds, if not thousands, of CPT activists in the provinces of

Pattalung, Trong, Satun in 1980-81. In one case in late 1980, the defection of the committee general secretary of these three provinces was followed by nearly 150 CPT activists in the jungle defecting, including those who were his relatives and those who "respected" him.

Ideological education could have solved, or at least minimized, this problem. However, the CPT's educational system was narrow and conservative, and the peasants usually had a low level of education in any case.⁶⁷ The low ability to learn and analyse the revolution hindered the CPT becoming a true Marxist-Leninist party. Apart from the leaders at the highest level in the Politburo and the central committee, CPT cadres did not read Mao's works much or even memorize quotations, and if they did they never really understood them. There were some basic booklets available to guide propaganda work or to explain how to remould personal and world outlooks which were widely read. Political training schools, which all CPT activists had to attend, were set up later when the intellectuals joined the CPT. However, these schools were more successful at shaping trainees in the pattern of revolutionary morality than increasing theoretical and analytical knowledge, since the trainees' perception of social problems and sophisticated revolutionary theories was limited and their intellectual potential could not be developed much by such a short period in school.

As the majority of CPT leaders were also of peasant origin, only a few of them were able to organize effective education. Where this was done, the method of teaching was likely to encourage trainees to memorize rather than think and analyse. In general, intellectuals realised that the CPT did not see the necessity of raising the level of theoretical study and using materials other than orthodox Maoist and official CPT sources. In one camp in the south, for instance, even Mao's works were forbidden for ordinary activists, since the camp leader had decided that his followers' ability to understand was so poor that the works might be wrongly interpreted. In the south also, CPT activists could listen only to the VOPT. This caution had

some advantages. As the imposition of these sorts of rules slackened later, the CPT began to lose strict control over its followers' morality. For example, government propaganda would work its way into the jungle with demoralizing effects on CPT activists, who were attracted by consumerism.

Although Mao emphasized that a revolutionary must be both "red" and "expert", the CPT seemed to train its cadres mainly in being "red". They stressed morality and discipline rather than efficiency - understandably, considering that the CPT had been fighting an illegal struggle against a superior government machine. However, the intellectuals felt that the CPT had not helped them fully to use their abilities to improve the revolution, especially their education and ability to use technology so as to turn them into revolutionary intellectuals. This seemed rough justice to them.

It is unlikely that any small communist party could have accommodated and provided a useful role for all of its 3,000 intellectuals much better than the CPT did. In the very early stages of any revolutionary war, there are bound to be limits to the degree to which intellectuals are accommodated, even in the bases or liberated zones. Therefore, many had to do manual work, and it must be stressed that such activities as production and transportation were two of the most important tasks in the jungle. The mass influx of intellectuals exerted great pressure on food supplies which could only be improved by production and transportation, not by education. Also, how could a communist party trust and allocate the tasks of education, mass propaganda and other crucial activities, to newcomers who were not even party members? The CPT was certainly aware that the government might use the student exodus to infiltrate its own agents into the jungle, which indeed it did.

However, things could have been done more efficiently. It was true, as intellectuals realised, that the CPT had no plans to build a new society after liberation, perhaps because it perceived the armed struggle as a protracted war, and so had no immediate concern with such plans. The CPT leaders thought that when the time arrived, the intellectuals in the city

would help them. They could not in any case do away overnight with the gigantic bureaucratic system of government. Many civil servants were to be retained to conduct the running of the new government. The CPT's view of the new society, as reflected in party programmes, was therefore vague and did not satisfy either Thai urban intellectuals or sympathizers abroad.

Being an hierarchical organisation, the CPT did not escape the diseases of corruption and inefficiency which prevailed in the government. Tandrup seems to misjudge this point in claiming that because CPT cadres realised that the CPT's power was derived from the people, they were much more reluctant to abuse it than government personnel.⁶⁹ Corruption among CPT leaders was not exceptional, and, when exposed, usually resolved by compromise, the culprits being punished lightly and staying on.⁷⁰

(3) The Lack of Democracy in the CPT

To operate underground activities despite constant suppression from the government, the CPT needed a special organisational structure, rules and discipline, so it adopted a Leninist type of revolutionary organisation. The party structure was essentially hierarchical. Contacts were allowed only vertically and communication with other units could be made only through a higher party unit. In theory, the party operated on the principle of democratic centralism. In brief, all party members had the full right to voice their concerns, ideas and recommendations to the party leadership, but at the same time they had to obey the order of higher party units or cadres from the Central Committee down.

Democratic centralism was reflected in four points of the "iron discipline" which stated "1) personnel are subject to and must obey the party's organisation; 2) the minority are subject to and must follow the majority; 3) the lower strata are subject to and must follow the upper

strata; and 4) all members of the organisation at all levels and from all branches are subject to and must follow the highest committee of the party, namely, the Central Committee".⁷¹

Theoretically, the highest organ of the party was the party congress, held every five years. At the congress, delegates from party units would assemble to consider, review and endorse all the party's main activities -notably policy, strategy and organisation. It also elected the Central Committee. In this way the party could create a unity of revolutionary practice. It did not really work like this. The lack of democracy in CPT organs was the object of the severest criticism when the intellectuals voiced their resentments. The CPT itself admitted that it had overemphasized centralism. Seksan Prasertkun, a former student leader, complained bitterly that he had had to struggle for democracy all over again in the jungle.⁷²

The practice of democratic centralism varied depending on particular cadres and areas. Seksan said that he himself had heard that in some areas it had been practised well, but in his own experience he did not receive justice, and the blame for this lay both with the jadtang and non-jadtang. More important, perhaps, he pointed out that democracy was a means of solving problems, though it was not the essence of the problem. There could then be all sorts of differences of opinion. The point was that he had little opportunity or power to voice his ideas. He insisted that it was only a particular group within the party that used its influence in destructive ways.

Seksan's interview reflected what was happening within the CPT. Apparently there were two major interpretations of democratic centralism among CPT personnel. The first interpretation emphasized centralism, and considered that democracy was only a means of gathering ideas and information. Democracy was practised in order to achieve centralism - as a means, not an end. The second interpretation held that both democracy and centralism must be practised simultaneously throughout the decision making

process. Decisions should be made according to democratic rules and only their implementation was to be conducted according to the concept of centralism. Democracy here was both means and end. In practice, the majority of CPT personnel adhered to the former line of interpretation rather than the latter.⁷⁴

One factor leading to this majority tendency was the conditions in which the CPT operated, as already explained. Without strict discipline and rules the CPT could not survive. CPT armed forces needed similar principles to any conventional army to fight effectively. However, in the long term CPT leaders developed a habitual tendency of emphasizing centralism, and, as the party itself admitted, they tended to overlook opportunities where the practice of democracy and following the mass line was possible. This tendency was facilitated by the remnants of Sakdina attitudes among the peasants. As discussed earlier, CPT leaders had been accustomed to dealing with the peasants as submissive beings, while the peasants accepted the lead of those they trusted rather than being critical and independent.⁷⁵ The CPT leadership contended that without the CPT the masses could not acquire political consciousness and consequently could not become a progressive force for revolution. The party's mass line, which stated that the party must listen to its followers and the people, was often neglected, which in turn led to the practice of radical pragmatism or Latti Janejat (literally, extreme emphasis on practical experience), or subjectivism. These two extreme opposites resulted in 1) the party removing itself from reality; 2) the party not being able to maintain unity between theory and practice; and 3) the party becoming inflexible and out-of-date.

Too much emphasis on centralism also meant that the election of party officials, even at the lower levels and in the jungle, where it was possible, was totally ignored. All positions of responsibility were appointed from a

higher level. With patron-client attitudes and family ties, the relatives or close followers of the leading cadres were usually appointed, sometimes as if they had a right of inheritance.⁷⁷

Party congresses, as well as provincial congresses, which provided the only occasion when the party's rank and file could finally voice its ideas and evaluate the functions of the ruling organs, were postponed again and again. A party congress was not held for twenty years.⁷⁸ As a result it was obvious that the party could not respond properly to a changing situation.

Whether by accident or design, the revolution grew and the CPT was able to recruit more followers. This made CPT leaders at the top highly self-confident, so that they firmly believed that the line they had chosen and implemented was generally right, as stated in the Report of the Fourth Party Congress. They were representatives, they thought, of the most progressive forces. The party was supreme, infallible and the only hope of the Thai people. They also seemed to believe that all patriotic and democratic people who were against imperialist influences and dictatorial rule would also accept the need for armed struggle.⁷⁹

The united front could not therefore expand its membership or be dependent, but was forced to accept the CPT's umbrella - the relationship again tended to be that of patron and client instead of one of equals. Later, the united front was forced into dissolution. The first two front organisations - the Thailand Independence Movement (TIM), and the Thailand Patriotic Front (TPF), founded in 1964 and 1965 respectively, gradually faded from Thai public attention and fell silent.⁸⁰ The CCPDF, which could be regarded as the only real national front organisation in the history of the Thai communist movement, faced a similar fate. The CPT's over-interference caused conflicts between the CPT and other non-communist individuals and organisations, and led to a break in 1980. This occurred when a proposal

from the non-communist CCPDF members for a restructuring of the CCPDF was rejected by the CPT as an attempt to split from the CPT and establish another organisation with different directives that would compete with the CPT.⁸¹

FOOTNOTES

1. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.216 quoted from Tawan Mai, 20 October, 1980
2. Ibid., p.222 quoted from an interview with a CPT member, Siam Nikorn, Vol.95, 23 April 1979
3. Morell & Chaiananda, op.cit., p.304
4. Girling, op.cit., p.283 footnote 82. The first public criticism from the CPT, though informal, appeared around the same period in an interview of a party member in the south who said that Vietnam was behaving like a regional imperialist and had become a capitalist reviver, while defending China as the real socialist. ('Jungle-men', August 1979, pp.87-89). This was a reprint of the interview first published in Siam Nikorn a few months earlier.
5. Conversation with Comrade Prawat, a Central Committee member in the jungle, south of Thailand, 1981. Comrade Prawat, or Sin Termlim, was later elected a politburo member in the Fourth Party Congress, 1982.
6. Conversation with a CPT military leader trained in North Vietnam, in the jungle in south Thailand, 1979. He also said that Thai students and Vietnamese teachers were cautious with each other. The Thais were forbidden by the CPT to discuss any sensitive issues with the Vietnamese while sometimes the Vietnamese tried to ask questions to test the Thais' attitude.
7. Conversation with comrade Prawat, 1981.
8. For more details of this crucial event, see Wedel, op.cit., pp.19-21 which gives different accounts in some aspects but the main content is the same.
9. Girling, op.cit., p.283 and Ponpirom, op.cit., p.207
10. Girling, op.cit., p.283 quoted from Michael Richardson, Age, 14 July 1979; Ponpirom, op.cit., p.208 quoted from the Bangkok Post, 21 October 1979
11. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.208 quoted from South, February 1981. She also quotes Paul Petit-Jean 'Evolution of the Thai and Philippine Communist Party II', p.147 "... Apparently the CPT agreed to scuttle its main propaganda instrument as the price for Bangkok's support to the Khmer Rouge in order to contain Vietnamese influence". Petit-Jean's view is close to the CPT's own explanation to its rank and file. A communique in 1979 emphasized the VOPT's closure as the CPT's voluntary action to save the CCP's embarrassment in supporting the Khmer Rouge through the Thai government. Comrade Prawat said that the CCP just presented the situation to the Thai delegates in China and allowed the CPT to make its decision - an action which, seen from a different point of view, was a polite request for the closure of the VOPT.
12. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.208
13. Saiyud, op.cit., p.13.

14. Saying that there was a change in government counter-insurgency policy from using military means to using peaceful means as Ponpirom suggests (p.204) can be misleading. In fact, whoever commanded the government's counter-insurgency policy, they never intended to abandon the use of military and police forces. The use of 'political means' was not 'peaceful means', for they were always backed by strong military pressure, but more discriminatingly than before.
15. Figures can vary considerably depending on the source used, see Girling, op.cit., p.257 footnote 12, p.262 footnote 20; Tandrup, op.cit., p.147; Kanok, op.cit., pp.290-296 and the map on p.63.
16. Kanok, op.cit., pp.148-155
17. An interview with Thirayuth Bunmi, Gentleman's Magazine, August 1987.
18. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.205
19. The authors have adopted different approaches to this issue. Ponpirom addresses 'the nature of conflict'. Kanok spreads it among various aspects of the CPT. Tandrup buries it in chapters which deal with the revolution as a whole, and Wedel divides it into several chapters so that the reader must bring it together. The author adopts Ponpirom's method, but changes the heading.
20. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.234-235
21. Ibid., p.212
22. Wedel, op.cit., p.23. The author replaces the word 'radicals' with the more appropriate term 'intellectuals'.
23. Tienchai Wongchaisuwan in his 'Rebel's Memoir' written under the pseudonym 'Yuk Sri-ariya', 1980.
24. Kanok, op.cit., p.328 quoted from Nopporn & Kraissak, 1981
25. Ibid.
26. Thirayuth Bunmi in 'Two Lines of the Revolution', 1981, p.83
27. Wedel, op.cit., p.24 - an interview with Jiranand Pitrprecha, 9 December 1980. Jiranand is Seksan's wife.
28. Ibid., p.25 - an interview with Gonggiat Kongka, 15 December 1980
29. Ibid., p.25 - an interview with Seksan Prasertkun, 9 December 1980
30. Ibid., p.25 quoted from Yuk Sri-ariya, 1980.
31. For more discussion on Maoism and the CPT, see Wedel, op.cit., pp.27-29
32. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.213-214 quoted from 'An interview with Seksan Prasertkun', Tawan Mai, 19 January, 1981
33. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.213-214 quoted from Thai Nikorn, 11 June 1979
34. Wedel, op.cit., p.25
35. Conversation with Comrade Sri, 1981

36. Conversation with Comrade Prawat, 1980
37. Wedel, op.cit., pp.20-21
38. Thirayuth in 'Two Lines of Revolution', 1981, pp.82-83
39. Wedel, op.cit., pp.32-33
40. Kanok, op.cit., pp.390-404 quotes from T. Shanin 'Peasants and Peasant Societies' 1971, to conclude that, first; because of their self-sufficiency and close interaction within their community, they tend to be politically inactive, and secondly, because of their conservative attitudes, they tend to firmly follow, without challenge, an external element establishing leadership among them. Peasants therefore are easy for a revolutionary party to mobilise, but their characteristics make them quite difficult to influence in terms of their beliefs and behaviour, which in turn makes it hard for a party dominated by peasants to adapt its strategy efficiently to a changing environment. See Scott, J.C., The Moral Economy of the Peasant, 1976, Wolf, E.R., Peasant Wars in the Twentieth Century, 1969, and Kanok, a study of 1974, no title mentioned.
41. Popkin, S., The Rational Peasant, 1974, adopts the same view. In his argument against Scott (1976), using his study on peasant rebellions in Vietnam, he proposes that a peasant is a "rational problem-solver, with a sense both of his own interests and of the need to bargain with others to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes" (p.ix). Peasants do not necessarily act to further their group or common interest, they often opt for individual interests over the common interest. When they join a peasant movement this does not imply that they perceive a threat to their class or their own subsistence, ie, in terms of increasing poverty - the issue is the risk to individual participants. He clearly stresses that whether a self-interested peasant will or will not contribute to a collective action depends on the benefit to the individuals not the group. Any attempt to organize group action must recognize the distinction between individual and group, and must provide effective leadership as well as sufficient incentives (pp.245, 251-2). When peasants find the leadership ineffective and incentives insufficient, they are very unlikely to devote themselves to such collective action. This is what really happened to the relationship between Thai peasants and the CPT.
42. See Kanok, op.cit., pp.117-124
43. Yuk Sri-ariya, 1980, op.cit., pp.97-99, 179
44. A western scholar suggests that more research on concrete Thai reality should be done before one can reach any conclusion, as up to the present time detailed and reliable data is scarce. He also confirms that Marx's "feudalism" is different from the Sakdina system. (Conversation with Andrew Turton, 1984).
45. Strategy is the overall policy for revolutionary war which directs all revolutionary activities, political as well as military, in order to develop a coherent revolutionary process. A strategy is formulated according to the fundamental characteristics of the society and will not change so long as those characteristics do not change.

Tactics are simply methods by which particular objectives are accomplished to further the revolution. Tactics may vary from one mission to another depending on the particular conditions of each mission.

46. Kanok, op.cit., p.370
47. Conversation with Comrade Prawat, 1977
48. Ibid.
49. Kanok found that Mao's and a CPT strategist's rationale in adopting armed revolution in rural areas among peasants were similar or identical. Comrade Prawat admitted that the statement in commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the CPT in 1972 was merely a clever copy of eight volumes of Mao's Selected Works. It was done by a politburo member and sent to broadcast on the VOPT without the consent of the politburo or the Central Committee. With this strategy, the Thai national democratic revolution was essentially an agrarian revolution.
50. Yuk Sri-ariya, 1980, op.cit.
51. Ibid., pp.47-81
52. Kanok, op.cit., p.377
53. Turton, A., Fast, J., & Caldwell, M., Thailand - Roots of Conflict, 1978, p.165.
54. Wedel, op.cit., p.39
55. Ibid., p.40 - interview with Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, 27 November 1980
56. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.10. For details, see Akin Rabibhadana 'The Organization of Thai Society in the Early Bangkok Period, 1969
57. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.12-13
58. Ibid., p.117
59. Ibid., pp.22-23; Tandrup, p.35 quoted from Scott & Kirkvliet 'The Politics of Survival: Peasant Responses to Progress in Southeast Asia' in Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol IV, No 2, September 1973, p.255ff. Not only peasants but also urban dwellers have the patron-client attitudes, though to a lesser extent.
60. Kanok, op.cit., p.299
61. Ibid. Some recruits used to be bandits or criminals, nakreng (strong men), people on the run after a fight with officials (Marcel Barang 'Divisions linger among Thai Rebels', 1981 quoted in Tandrup, op.cit., p.128)
62. Conversation with a female cadre active in mass propaganda and recruitment, 1982
63. Tandrup, op.cit., p.137 quoted from S. Cattori & J. Cattori 'Asie du Sud-Est L'Enjeu Thailanders' (L'Harmatton, 1979)
64. Ibid., p.138

65. Yuk Sri-ariya, 1980, op.cit., pp.24-26
66. Tandrup, op.cit., p.138 quoted from 'Why I Left the Terrorists', Southeast Asia, no date but approximately 1971.
67. It has been said that in Thailand there is no tradition of reading. Even the majority of university students do a minimum of reading, ie. just enough to enable them to pass their examinations. The author therefore disagrees with Wedel, Kanok, Ponpirom and Tandrup who completely separate the intellectuals or students from the peasants on this issue. If it had been as they suggest, the intellectuals would not have joined the CPT in the first place.
68. 'Junglemen Return to Towns' (1980), p.21
69. Tandrup, op.cit., p.141
70. The author heard of some wrong-doing when in the jungle in the south of Thailand. For example, the commander of the Surat Thani PLAT, who was a heavy drinker, had seriously abused party discipline and caused a rift inside his camp. He was punished only by being transferred from his military position to another post of the same level of responsibility in the provincial committee.
71. Sittharn Rakprathet 'Knowledge of the Communist Party of Thailand', Bangkok, 1977, p.160 (in Thai)
72. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.216 quoted from Tawan Mai, 20 October 1980
73. 'Junglemen Return to Towns' (1980), pp.36-38
74. Kanok, op.cit., pp.310-311 - an interview with a party activist in Bangkok, August 1980
75. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.216
76. Kanok, op.cit., p.310
77. Ibid. - an interview with Tienchai Wongchaisuwan, 1981
78. After the Fourth Party Congress, Comrade Prawat gave the author an excuse for this mistake by saying that conditions were always unsuitable for organizing the Congress, apart from a period between the 14 October uprising and the 6 October incident (1974-5). He also revealed that because of the postponement the Central Committee could not muster a quorum due to the arrests, death and defection of its members.
79. Kanok, op.cit., p.415
80. Ibid., p.416
81. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.218-219

CHAPTER FOUR

**The Split at the Fourth Party Congress
Changes that were too little and too late**

Ignorant men don't know what good they hold in their hands until they've flung it away.

Sophocles

It is more serious not to succeed in analysing a mistake than to have committed one.

Lenin

As the intellectuals increasingly saw that there was no room for compromise between their ideas and the practices of the CPT, the party seemed to put more open pressure on them to reform.

It is important to understand that the CPT perceived the intellectuals as petty bourgeois who possessed the weak characteristics of individualism, indecisiveness and liberalism. Although the CPT's practice towards the intellectuals varied with the particular CPT leader, in general the CPT view was that intellectuals should toil at manual labour to balance their experience from theory, and in order to become revolutionary intellectuals.¹ Besides, the intellectuals in many CPT areas felt that they were being treated more like 'guests' than equal comrades in arms, and that they were not expected to propose new ideas on party policy but just to follow orders.²

The CPT, however, seemed to assume from the start that the intellectuals would not anyway stay with them in the long term, and the split from the CPT confirmed this assumption. A Central Committee member and a provincial committee member told this author even before the split that they had for a long time believed that only a fragment - a figure of 10% was given by the latter - of intellectuals could adapt themselves to the hardships of jungle life and the strict discipline of the revolutionary movement to remain with the CPT.³ The CPT's reaction to those who split, therefore, was to blame

their weaknesses: the split reflected class struggle within the party; the leavers were (pro-Soviet) revisionists or else part of an attempt to destroy the revolutionary movement.⁴

There were, possibly, two major causes of defection: 1) personal problems; and 2) ideological conflicts. These two causes both imply weaknesses in the CPT's personnel training process, as discussed above. However, the evidence seems to indicate that before 1978 most CPT personnel defected because of personal problems, while after 1978 most CPT defectors pointed to ideological conflict as the major cause of their defection.⁵

Nonetheless, one must be careful in accepting this conclusion. The other authors' argument may well be justified if one takes defectors after 1978 only from among the intellectuals. In reality, not only the intellectuals but a large number of peasants too left the jungle. Given the characteristics of peasants already discussed, it is unlikely that the majority of them defected for ideological reasons. Their main reason was apparently loss of faith that the revolution would soon gain victory. Those who had been members of the CPT for a long time began to think of their families and security. Young men who had joined the guerrillas, mostly at the height of the revolution, after October 1976, began to think of marriage. Those who were tied to specific cadres followed their 'mentors' who themselves left for various reasons. All of these may be regarded as personal problems. Some intellectuals left the jungle due to personal problems as well. However, this applied only in a few cases, a minority compared with those who were in ideological conflict with the CPT.⁶

As already mentioned, the CPT had foreseen the defection of the intellectuals and the intellectuals said they knew from the beginning that there would be differences with the CPT.⁷ However, neither side was aware of the extent of these conflicts. The CPT leadership apparently did not imagine that the intellectuals would leave mainly because of ideological conflict, or that the split would cause the tremendous damage to the party that it did.

Nonetheless, it would be simplistic to conclude that the most important cause of conflict was "the simple question of nationalism", as Wedel believes.⁸ The evidence suggests that among the intellectuals attitudes toward the CPT differed, as between ordinary student activists on the one hand and student leaders, union leaders or professionals, on the other. Members of the latter group had been in leading positions and were more self-opinionated, egotistical, self-confident and used to issuing commands and being respected by their followers. They expected their talents in organising, making converts and developing policy and strategy to be put to use in the party, and to make a major impact on the CPT. However, in the jungle they became mere followers and thus were prone to conflict with CPT leaders.⁹

A distinction should also be made between those who kept a low profile in attacking the CPT - such as Seksan or Thirayut - and those who actively made attempts to destroy the CPT in every way they could, including collaboration with government, such as Tienchai or Therdpum. Therdpum, for example, is known to have joined the Vietnamese and Lao to set up a new communist movement to compete with the CPT. His and Tienchai's accounts, which Wedel uses extensively, especially on the domination of China over the CPT leadership, should not be considered entirely reliable. It is thus likely that intellectuals defected from the CPT for a variety of reasons, which should, however, mainly be categorized as ideological.

For the intellectuals, the split was as major an event as that when they decided to abandon their urban lives, their families and their potentially bright futures. They were shocked and dismayed. Only a few turned coat and co-operated with the government. The great majority were still dissatisfied with the government and with the injustices within Thai society, but saw no way of fulfilling their aims. Although many took jobs in non-governmental development organisations to continue "serving the people", they often had to go back to finish their degrees and to start from scratch in order to gain financial security for themselves and their families. To say

that they did not abandon the basic Marxist framework, and that the vast body of Marxist literature was still the major source of their ideas,¹⁰ would be naive. The intellectuals, apart from the very few recruited by the CPT before the 6 October incident, were only partially inclined to Marxism. As Thirayut says about himself,¹¹ the intellectuals settled down to study Marxism, Leninism and Maoism in the jungle, but were thinkers rather than practitioners. On leaving the jungle, they were still more sceptical about dogmatic doctrines. They came to see politics as it was in reality, a phenomenon which no single, supreme system of thought could explain adequately. Many turned to the study of Buddhism, which has flourished noticeably among university students since the end of the 1970s. Lastly, many of them are no longer political, and simply live their lives as ordinary citizens.

The Long-Awaited Fourth Party Congress

The conflict between the intellectuals and the CPT leadership, which had begun primarily with small, specific causes, expanded and developed uncontrollably throughout the CPT, affecting not only the intellectuals but also peasants and workers, as well as the old comrades. The CPT's reply to criticism did not convince its followers.¹² So the jungle started to lose its population. The number of CPT followers reported to have given themselves up to the authorities increased from 572 in 1978, to 1,479 in 1979 and 1,565 in 1980.¹³ These figures do not include those who left the jungle without reporting to the authorities. Official sources estimated that the total regular forces of the CPT, which had reached a peak of 11,000 in 1979, dropped to 7,900 in 1981 and to only 400-500 by mid-1987.¹⁴ Moreover, numerous activists and supporters in towns were cut off from the CPT because certain cadres who were at critical connection points simply ceased working for the CPT, or else because the CPT cut itself off from certain activists who had vehemently criticized the party.¹⁵

The conflict roused other CPT members in all parts of the country to rethink all the issues raised. Group studies, discussions and seminars on all aspects of the revolution and the party were held, with the conclusion usually going against the CPT leadership, in that it had been narrow-minded and had held a monopolistic attitude opposed to the interests of the revolution and the people.¹⁶

This unfavourable situation forced the CPT to hold its Fourth Party Congress in an attempt to solve the internal problems and revitalize the party, even though the environment was hostile.¹⁸ Sources from a government intelligence unit, and from intellectuals who had had contact with leading members of the CPT, reported that it was probably the dominant faction of Wirat Angkathaworn that had avoided holding the Fourth Party Congress for twenty years, for fear of open debate and the elimination of Wirat's power in the Central Committee and the Politburo.¹⁹

The organisation of the Fourth Congress was different from previous congresses. Due to the sudden withdrawal of support from Vietnam and Laos, some Politburo members like Wirat were still in China and could not come back. The Central Committee therefore decided to hold three regional conferences; in the north, the northeast and the south, instead of one single assembled congress. They used Morse transmission to coordinate discussion and relay messages to Wirat.²⁰

The plan to hold the Congress was leaked to the government, which consequently launched a massive, country-wide suppression campaign in an attempt to wipe out CPT bases and prevent the holding of the Congress at all costs. As a result, the conferences could not be held concomitantly. The northeastern conference finished early because it was seriously threatened by government armed forces. The agenda of the Congress could therefore not be properly discussed. The Congress ran over a period of six weeks in March-May 1982, but did not create the fervently desired unity within the party.²¹ In fact, voting was conducted separately and at different times, and caused much

controversy. Votes in favour of reform and changes from the northeast were turned down by the leadership despite the fact that it had more delegates than all the rest of the party put together. This caused much resentment among CPT cadres in the northeast and led to a subsequent mass surrender to the government. This surrender shocked and demoralized CPT followers all over the country and caused a chain reaction.

The Fourth Party Congress revealed the most violent internal conflict and debate in the history of the CPT. Observers all point to the arduous fighting between the 'conservative' or 'Maoist' dominant faction led by Wirat and others of the old guard, especially in the south, and the more 'liberal', 'moderate' or 'progressive' faction that was strongest in the northeast.²² Ponpirom²³ and Tandrup²⁴ reach conflicting conclusions on the result of the Congress: the former using Thai sources, suggests that Wirat's faction still had the upper hand and was able to block a considerable part of the reform proposals, while the latter, using Western sources, believes that the 'moderates' gained victory with basic changes in party policy. Later developments appear to confirm Ponpirom's conclusions rather than Tandrup's.

Though the party admitted that there had been some mistakes and misunderstandings it maintained that it was largely right. Its self-criticism was too broad and too vague in the eyes of most intellectuals, including those who remained with the CPT in the hope of radical changes. No clear examples were given of acknowledged mistakes. Sympathizers abroad complained that they could not imagine how the CPT would run the country if the party won the revolution.

There were visible changes, certainly, which Tandrup and Western observers believed to be in favour of the moderates. The definition of Thai society, for example, was changed from 'semi-colonial, semi-feudal' to 'semi-colonial, semi-capitalist with remnants of Sakdina influence'; 'land revolution' was replaced by 'the abolition of Sakdina exploitation'; other 'forms of struggle' were to be upgraded, though the CPT would continue armed

struggle; the party's foreign policy was to be more independent; and attempts were to be made to improve relations with all sympathizers and communist movements and parties, including the USSR, Vietnam and Laos.²⁵ The Ten-point Programme was rewritten, expanded and replaced by a Twenty-point Programme. Although this new programme was considered to be an attempt to win more moderate people to the side of the CPT, it was also in line with the moderation shown by the Chinese government at the time.²⁶

The new Central Committee was elected with its total strength reduced to eighteen. Although most of its members were old faces, two former student leaders of the 1973 generation were represented. This was slight evidence of a growing understanding within the party leadership that it was necessary to bridge the generation gap in the movement.²⁷ Accounts of the election of the new party secretary-general rely on guess work, because the election was conducted among a small group of seven Politburo members. The pseudonym 'Prache Tanyapaibun' was used but one analysis concludes that this may not be a single person but a name given to a group of three Politburo members - one of them being Wirat.²⁸ Ultimately all the sources agree that the pro-Chinese grouping in the CPT still held power after the Fourth Party Congress.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.220-221 quoted from a CPT document 'The Analysis of the Dualistic Character of the Petty Bourgeois'.
2. Ibid., pp.220-221 quoted from an underground document 'A Report on Revolutionary Intellectuals in the Lower Northeastern Party Who Held a Seminar and the Announcement of Their Objectivity, March 10-11, 1981'.
3. Conversations with Comrade Prawat and Comrade Sri, 1978.
4. Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.221-222 quoted from an interview with a CPT member in Siam Nikorn, 23 April 1979; Charn Krasnaipura 'Some Aspects of the Political Situation in Thailand', Tittang, Vol 8, August 1980; and an underground document 'How can we understand the present situation', August 1979.
5. Kanok, op.cit., p.350.
6. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.223. Kanok's note (p.351) that many defectors were seriously ill and in need of special medical treatment is rather an exaggeration, at least to the author's knowledge.
7. Wedel, op.cit., p.51.
8. Ibid., p.52.
9. Some of these people's statements were so arrogant that the author finds them absurd. For example, Terdpum Chaidee in his interview given to Wedel, 6 February 1981, said that '... the discipline, I could follow; the conditions I could bear, but there was no future... I could scramble up and down the mountains better than the Hmong (hill tribesmen), but I could not see any possibility of victory', Ibid., p.48.
10. Ibid., p.54.
11. An interview with Thirayuth Bunmi, Gentleman's Magazine, 1987, pp.53-54.
12. For details, see Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.223-227.
13. 'The CPT Comes to its Deterioration', Su Anakot, 9-15, August 1981, quoted in *ibid.*, p.228.
14. The figure is from ISOC, in Kao Piset, 11-17 November 1987.
15. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.228 - an interview with a former CPT cadre in Bangkok, 8 August 1981.
16. For details, see *ibid.*, pp.229-230.
17. 'Junglemen Return to Towns', 1980, pp.125-126.

18. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.231. In an interview in March 1982, a defector from the northeast said that the Congress came about as a result of pressure from party members, especially the cadres in the northeastern region, and the need to improve the image of the party as open-minded and liberal.
19. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.231, from an unofficial discussion at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, September 1982.
20. Ibid., p.233, quoted from Far Eastern Economic Review, 17-23 September 1982. It was said within the CPT that the meeting in China was counted as another conference of equal weight with the three conferences held on Thai soil.
21. Tandrup's suggestion (p.200) that while unity was secured, the CPT was far from agreement on policy was proved erroneous.
22. Udom Srisuwan surrendered to the government half a year after the Fourth Congress, revealing that the CPT centre had moved from Nan province to Surat Thani-Nakorn Sri Thammarat in the south in 1977 and remained there till the Congress.
23. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.234.
24. Tandrup, op.cit., p.200.
25. Ibid.
26. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.236.
27. Tandrup, op.cit., p.201. Information about the Central Committee is taken from Matichon, 7 September 1982.
28. For details, see Ponpirom, op.cit., pp.236-237 and Tandrup, op.cit., p.201, note 42.

CHAPTER FIVE

The CPT at the End of the Twentieth Century:
Is there a Future?

No troubles can stand in our path
Keep on fighting
The victory we yearn for will come.
A revolutionary song

Although it lost a large number of followers in the 'crisis of confidence', the CPT was still recognized as the biggest and strongest opposition group that could effectively challenge the government. Some still believed that if the CPT tried sincerely to criticise itself, to pinpoint its mistakes and to correct them by every possible means its fortunes could be revived and the revolution expanded again, through a more flexible, up-to-date, Thai-oriented policy and strategy. However, the Fourth Party Congress proved to be a major disappointment. The changes that occurred there were not only too little and too late, but lacked sincerity. In addition, the political environment, both in Thailand and abroad, had become even more unfavourable to communist movements in the country.

Three years after the congress, the CPT had not improved much. The Party leadership still admired China,¹ although attempts were made to re-establish relations with communist and left-wing parties and movements.² These attempts were reportedly unsuccessful for several reasons. Firstly, the CPT could not clear itself of all the accusations that had been made against it before the congress. Secondly, the Twenty-point Programme was too broad and too vague to be impressive. Thirdly, the revolutionary situation in Thailand was at an ebb, sympathizers abroad having already turned to support the Philippines' National Democratic Front (NDF) or scattered. Fourthly, the Soviet allies - Vietnam and Laos - remained hostile toward the CPT and increasingly supported the alternative communist movement in Thailand.³

The adoption of the new definition of Thai society did not help the CPT to improve its image much, since it was generally accepted among intellectuals that in fact no solid conclusion could be drawn on this issue at the time due to insufficient basic social data. New attitudes, such as acknowledgement and praise of the October 14 Movement, and of Pridi Pawomyong, were seen as belated attempts to please the broad mass of patriotic and democratic people. To the present day, people are still sceptical that the CPT's commitment to armed struggle has changed, although the CPT states that other forms of struggle are equally important.⁴

The overwhelming proportion of peasants in the party, and the continuing control by the old guard in the Central Committee hinder the CPT from attempting a drastic and effective rejuvenation. For example, even after the Congress, the CPT failed to take innovative measures to stop the migration of its followers from the jungle, or to make it advantageous to the party in any way. Cadres from the provincial committee level down had repeatedly requested advice on practical matters to no avail, and they were left to rely on their own wits to solve most problems just as before. The excuse for this inefficiency was that the party's centre could not find a secure place to settle down so that it could respond to the requests.

The new Twenty-point Programme appears to have been a purely political, cosmetic move to regain recognition and support from progressive and moderate people, while in fact the majority of the CPT leadership is conservative, dogmatic and bureaucratic. It is said that Phirum Chatvanichkun, a former student leader who was elected a Central Committee member at the Fourth Party Congress, broke from the confinement of the old guard's conservative ideas, giving several interviews to Thai and foreign reporters about the new attitudes, policy and strategy in order to indirectly force change on the party. His arrest in July 1984 was a blow to those few moderates and intellectuals who had remained in the party, pinning their hopes on him.

In fact, on some points the new programme is tantamount to a lie. For example, in the first edition where the process of revolution is explained, the CPT leadership leads its followers and sympathizers to believe that the party would henceforward treat other patriotic and democratic forces on equal terms, and that whoever was able to lead the revolution could do so without the objection of the CPT. In fact, the dogmatic idea that the revolution must be led only by the CPT is firmly entrenched with the CPT leadership, along with the idea that it will inevitably lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The CPT has been saddled with its rigid bureaucratic structure and has proved less adaptable than the ruling class.⁵ The ruling class has learned many useful lessons from the growth of the revolution. It has shifted to the softer policy of 'political means before military means'. The government has introduced liberalism and reformism, if only to a limited extent. It distributes more wealth to the rural areas and the urban poor. It infiltrates its own people into labour and peasant movements, sometimes into the leadership of these mass organisations and succeeds in mobilizing them to support its projects. It organises mass education and sets people up in militias against the CPT.

For those progressive intellectuals who are still active the liberal atmosphere is certainly more attractive than revolutionary armed struggle. They have turned to legal and peaceful activities. Moreover, the failure of the Indochina governments to develop their respective countries effectively and peacefully under the flag of socialism, plus the present capitalistic tendency of China, have damaged the image of the CPT and its socialist programme. The intellectuals now feel that the revolutionary road is too long, too costly and too uncertain for them to follow. They are not sure that even if the CPT could win the revolution, the party would be able to run the country smoothly or in the manner that they would like to see.⁶

Since the government shifted its policy towards the insurgency in 1980, the political atmosphere in Thailand has become very different from the anti-red phobia of 1976-77.⁷ Now it is more liberal. Parliamentary democracy has survived military coups, which were once regular events, for more than ten years, though political parties are still weak and the bureaucrats and the military remain very influential. Violent action to bring about a better society is generally less acceptable today. Revolutionary conditions which used to promote the growth of the CPT, such as brutal suppression, are not as visible to the public as before. Corruption is still rife, but the government has shown that it intends to get rid of at least some of it. Under these conditions the CPT's appeal has been reduced drastically and it has ceased to be a major focus within Thai politics, though the army still proclaims the CPT as the number one enemy of the nation.

Is there a Future for the CPT?

It was said that if the CPT could not win in the next twenty years, capitalism in Thailand will develop to such an extent that the chance for the CPT to win the social revolution will be gone forever.⁸ Ten years have passed and the CPT does not seem to have made any steps forward.

In July 1984 the police arrested twenty-two communist suspects. Among them were three members of the CPT Central Committee, who are now on trial. These arrests were followed by another series of arrests in the south of several CPT cadres, including at least three provincial committee members. In June 1987, the CPT suffered a major blow when eighteen communists were arrested, including two Politburo members and two Central Committee members when they gathered, according to the police, to plan the holding of the Fifth Party Congress. These CPT leaders and another cadre were released after being detained for less than five months. The assistant chief-of-staff on

civil affairs stated that these communists had changed their minds, abandoning armed struggle and accepting peaceful struggle through the parliamentary system.⁹

A former chief of the Police Special Branch has revealed that among seven members of the Politburo, only three remain and only one of them, Thong Jamsri, is at the moment in Thailand. Witat is seriously ill in Peking, and Winai Permpoonsap has disappeared, perhaps into hiding in the USA. No one has been appointed or elected to fill the vacancies and the CPT leadership is in disarray.¹⁰

The Thai Army, in its annual report on communist insurgency, estimated in September 1987 that there were only 400-500 armed communists remaining in Thailand. Apart from the south where the CPT has undertaken a few small, sporadic military operations, CPT activists operate passively with mainly logistical purposes. In the last three years the military threat from the CPT has been considered so infinitesimal that there has been no single major military operation on the government side. CPT activists constantly come out to surrender, and the CPT's hidden weapons are frequently discovered. Most of the 'red' and 'pink' areas, over which the army regained control, have become 'white' and have been returned to civilian administration. Full-time soldiers have been replaced by armed volunteers, who are reported to deal mainly with illegal logging or the local mafia rather than the communists.¹⁰

If the CPT is apparently so weak, is there any new alternative communist movement emerging? After the Fourth Party Congress, there were at least two groups inside the CPT which felt dissatisfied with the outcome of the Congress. One group, Trai-pakee (The Three Partners) was said to unite CPT elements in five provinces of the northern lowlands, the northern region of the northeast and in Bangkok. Another one, Paradon Thai (Thai Fraternity) was located in the southern region of the northeast. These two groups did not split from the party at that time, but started instead to operate with greater independence. Tandrup suggested that these groups could become

serious political rivals to the CPT.¹¹ Five years have passed and none of them is reported to have emerged as a potential force as such, and, if they remain within the CPT, the party will then be marred by the fractionalism and mutual distrust which Tandrup himself observed among urban Marxist groups when he visited Thailand in November 1981.¹²

Likewise a group of former CPT cadres and some of the CCPDF, who broke away to organise a new communist party sponsored by Vietnam and Laos, is also far from posing any threat to the government. Although government officials give differing accounts on this new party, it is agreed that its movements are restricted to the border areas with mainly intelligence and logistical purposes.¹³ Recently, the Thai army reported that this party had joined forces with Lao soldiers to fight the Thai armed forces in the disputed areas along the Thai-Lao border. Moreover, this has not been convincingly confirmed, and there is no evidence to suggest the strength of the new party.

The most recent information to hand reveals that the CPT urban organisations currently remain in disarray. After two major series of arrests, all connections between units have been severed in order to prevent the government from destroying the whole network, so each unit has to rely mainly on its own initiatives. The Fifth Party Congress, which should have been held last year, has been postponed indefinitely, and even theoretical discussions - that are very much needed to adjust the revolutionary strategy because of the rapidly changing situation - cannot be carried out. Nevertheless, in the rural areas the CPT claims to maintain its armed forces and propaganda units. In many areas, especially in the south, CPT activists have been working symbiotically with local government officials and police in such activities as maintaining law and order in the villages since the Fourth Party Congress. As regards its theoretical basis, the CPT admits that it cannot work out a clear definition of Thai society, and argues that at the moment this is not a major necessity, as the party has in any case to carry on the revolution. The CPT has apparently come to a cul-de-sac in its

revolution: no clear picture of Thai society, no clear theory, no guidelines of social revolution. The sacred task of bringing about socialism is being carried on in a way not dissimilar from the routine of government bureaucracy, without any hope of victory in the foreseeable future.

The government, on the other hand, has never stopped extending its application of order 66/23, which now covers a wide range of operations, especially psychological ones aimed specifically at persuading more communists to surrender by using incentives such as giving land or giving money in exchange for weapons given up. The government has invested more in developing rural areas and moved to eradicate 'revolutionary conditions' such as local influences, corrupt civil servants and groups of landlords and capitalists. Recently, the army has embarked on a major programme of 'greening the northeast', involving a budget of ten thousand million Baht (approximately, £1 = 45 Bahts). In addition, the ISOC has gone through radical changes to become more efficient. There have also been several attempts to replace the Anti-communist Activities Act with a broader Security Act and to make a communist party that does not advocate or use violence legal.¹⁴

Most government personnel in national security affairs believe that the CPT has already lost the battle and that there is little possibility that it can be restored to a position as powerful as the one it held in the late 1970s. However, many scholars, military men and police specialists on communist matters agree that as long as certain social conditions persist, a revival of violent opposition is possible, although they regard this as likely to exclude the CPT. Though revolutionary forces seem to be weak at the present time, the potential for social revolution still exists in Thai society.¹⁵ The political, social and economic causes underlying communist activity in Thailand remain. Some attempts have been made by the government to remedy these ills, but in the crucial areas of establishing a durable democratic process and correcting social injustices, little has really been

achieved. The government's claim that the communists have been beaten was made on purely military grounds, and in total disregard of other important political and economic factors. In fact, the primary factors contributing to the government's success since 1980 have been external ones.¹⁶ There is always the possibility that persistent exploitation and conflict will make people become more conscious and better organised, so that they will gradually demand more radical reform and social change, although this cannot be seen at present.¹⁷

The chances of the CPT or any armed revolutionary organisation winning a social revolution in Thailand may be slim,¹⁸ but in 1976-1980 the CPT expanded very rapidly gaining enormous strength and high morale, to the extent that it saw the possibility of winning the revolution, despite earlier predictions that it could never become a major threat to the Thai ruling class.

Thai characteristics - the influence of Buddhism, the Thai personality and high priority put on national independence - which are viewed by some authors as the main obstacles to the success of the CPT's revolution, may not be so under certain conditions. People were forced by brutality, lacking any other alternative, to choose armed struggle. At the height of the revolutionary war in the late 1970s, the CPT was shown to be a nationalist party fighting for democracy and a better Thai society, not a minority movement or a regional insurgency, as Girling suggests.¹⁹ This author still believes that if both the internal and external situations had remained as they were in the mid-1970s and not changed so drastically, the CPT could have won the social revolution, despite deep-rooted defects and serious mistakes and within the party.

The future of the CPT depends, on the one hand, on the situation and conditions in Thailand and the world as a whole, and on the other hand, very much on the state of the party itself. The CPT with its three main components - the party, the armed force and the front - is still operating,

and is now at the stage of developing a new strategy in which armed activity has been almost entirely suspended.²⁰ There can be no doubt that the CPT has survived and will survive.

To use Kanok's phrase, if the CPT's 'engaging-cognition' remains significantly and fundamentally the same as before without keeping up-to-date with changes in Thai society, its revolutionary strategy, tactics and practices cannot be effective. In having a realistic 'engaging cognition', the CPT needs not only a clear understanding of class structure, relations and the motivating forces of revolution, but also of the traditional values and norms of the Thai people.²¹ At the moment, although there is some evidence that the CPT is gradually going in this direction, change has been slow and seems to be seriously undermined by the conservative hardliners in the leadership. An ideological breakthrough must occur before any real progress can be made.

FOOTNOTES

1. Comrade Prawat told the author quietly but proudly in 1982 that though China could not give the CPT material support, it still secretly helped the CPT.
2. During the arrest of 22 communist suspects in July 1984, the Police Special Branch reported the finding of the CPT Central Committee's message of condolence to the Soviet Union on the death of the General Secretary Andropov. The police also revealed that the CPT had sent a representative to Europe to explain situations in Thailand and to get support from various solidarity groups, socialist and communist parties, the Green Party of West Germany, and the IRA. The CPT was also reported to be trying to negotiate with Vietnam and Laos again, and to set up relations with the government in Phnom Penh while keeping a link with the Khmer Rouge.
3. This 'new' communist movement has several names: Kabuan Thai Isan Kuchart (The Thai Northeast Liberation Movement), Pak Mai (The New Party), Pak Kommunist Dao Kiaw (The Green Star Communist Party).
4. In early 1984 the CPT reversed its policy again by saying that its efforts should be concentrated in the urban areas rather than give priority to the armed struggle in rural areas. It sent its remaining intellectuals back to work in the towns and cities. Nonetheless, the CPT had no intention at the time of setting up any sort of urban insurrection as the government suspected, and indeed had no capability so to do.
5. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.240.
6. Ibid., p.244. Some intellectuals who had been in the jungle expressed the belief that if the CPT won, there would be atrocities like those in Kampuchea. Kanok, pp.380-381, compares the CPT and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge with a more optimistic conclusion, namely that the CPT would be unlikely to mobilize people to return to rural areas.
7. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.242.
8. Ibid., p.243, quoted from 'The CPT Today' in Thai Nikorn, 11 June 1979.
9. Kao Piset, 11-17 November 1987.
10. Ibid.
11. Tandrup, op.cit., p.201.
12. Ibid., note 43.
13. Kao Piset, 1987, op.cit.
14. Ibid.
15. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.241.
16. Saiyud, op.cit., p.177.
17. Ponpirom, op.cit., p.246.

18. Ibid., p.241.
19. Girling, op.cit., pp.252-253.
20. Kanok, op.cit., p.360.

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Appendix

Life in the Jungle

It is difficult to generalize about conditions in the jungle as they differed greatly from area to area, and even from camp to camp in the same area. A relevant factor was the economic condition of the region. The economic prosperity of the southern region allowed a relatively comfortable life in the jungle there.

What I shall try to do here is to give a rough picture of life in the jungle based on my own experience in the south of Thailand. I never went to CPT camps in other regions where life was said to be much more difficult.

To be sure, life in the jungle was hard - if not dangerous - harder than a peasant's life in the village. Apart from a few camps which were situated in lowland areas, CPT members resided in thickly-wooded, mountainous terrain in thatched, bamboo huts grouped into camps.

The camp's location was normally in a valley beside a stream, but occasionally it hung on a hill slope - sometimes a steep one - or just lay on a hill top where water could be 'piped' down from a stream on a higher hill. Where it was possible, these simple huts were, from the mid-1970s, replaced by more comfortable huts built from wooden posts and boards cut with a chainsaw from big forest trees, and roofed with corrugated iron. In addition, the bamboo 'running water' pipes were replaced by polyethelene or plastic pipes.

Apart from the residential huts, there was a kitchen, a quartermaster's store house, a tailor's shop (sewing workshop), a school, a hospital and sometimes an engine or generator house. 'Specialist' camps, such as camps totally dedicated to being the central hospital and pharmaceutical workshop, or barracks, or weaponry factory, might have special-purpose buildings, but they normally included the above buildings.

Bathing was normally done in the stream itself, men and women segregated, with the men's places upstream. If the stream was too far away or too far down hill, pipes were used to convey water to the camp for bathing as well as for the kitchen. In this case, men and women shared the same 'bathhouse', but at different times. The toilets were of a very primitive type - pit toilets - which were, however, not very different from those that villagers normally used. They were in rows, open-air, with blinds between 'holes'. Though there were no lids for these holes, the toilets were sited lower down the slope and away from the kitchen.

Lighting was provided by the use of kerosene lamps. Later in the 1970s small electricity generators were occasionally used when there was a ceremony. However, after engineering students joined the CPT after the 6 October coup, hydroelectricity was available in some camps. Electric power enabled the CPT in the south to acquire some modern facilities, for example TV sets, electric dental equipment, machines and sophisticated tools for the ammunition and weaponry factories.

Food was communally cooked and served. The eating place was usually an open space beside the kitchen, in the kitchen itself or in the school if it was raining. Patients were served special meals at the hospital. Elderly persons and the camp leader - who was usually elderly - sometimes had special food as well. In the south the menu varied according to the season and war conditions. It consisted mainly of vegetables gathered from both the forest and grown in gardens. Wild animals were abundant. Wild boar, langur and gibbons could be hunted all year round. Birds were rather seasonal. Occasionally meat came from tigers, bears, mountain goats, deer, gaurs and even elephants. Normally, every camp had domesticated chickens and pigs, and when there was a big ceremony, such as on the Party Day (1 December), the First Gun-shot Day (7 August), Women's Day (8 March) and May Day, cattle and water buffalo were brought up from villages and slaughtered for the feast. If the situation was not desperate, there were sweets (desserts)

approximately every fortnight. Rice was always the staple food, but when there was a shortage - mostly due to the impossibility of buying it from outside (only a few camps could grow enough rice for their consumption) - it was mixed with cassava or corn or other root crops. Until 1980 rice came mainly from shifting cultivation. In that year the CPT, at least in the south, imposed a ban on deforestation, partly due to its conservation policy and partly because it needed the forests to protect the camps' locations. More wet-rice fields were created in valleys, but most of the rice consumed was bought from outside markets.

The CPT provided its followers in the jungle with every basic material for daily life, such as soap, toothpaste, tobacco, and uniforms or clothings. In the late '70s some camps in the south adopted a salary system, giving out money for members to buy goods from the camp shop, which enabled people to save some money to buy more sweets or tobacco, for example.

In order to provide all these things, a 'transport' expedition was organised every month. Goods were carried on the back in a sort of rucksack. Several camps might join together, with up to 300 men and women in a big expedition. This number excluded the large number of heavily-armed men who guarded the routes. The expeditions had to be undertaken at night, however, to avoid being defected by government armed forces. They were particularly difficult in the rainy season, when paths were extremely slippery. Sometimes - particularly when the army had organized siege operations - there were long-distance transport expeditions, which involved 2-5 full-days' walking over mountainous terrain.

Health care and hospitalization was in the hands of locally-trained nurses and a few 'doctors' trained in China. Common illnesses were gastric ulcers, Malaria and Typhoid fever. In contrast to popular opinion, which was formed by government propaganda, few members of the CPT lost their lives or were wounded in the first ten years of the revolutionary war, but those who suffered severe injuries usually died because of the lack of effective

medical equipment and surgical skills. However, with the return of trained physicians from China and the influx of medical students, the situation improved dramatically within a few years after 1976. Leg amputations for those who were wounded by land mines were common, and the amputees were later sent to have artificial legs fitted in government hospitals in Bangkok as 'ordinary' patients. Attempts to develop such artificial limbs in the jungle failed. Those who suffered abdominal wounds from bullets or shrapnel, however severe, were normally saved if they reached the physicians in time. Later, when there was a major battle, a team of these experienced physicians and nurses would accompany the armed men to the battlefield. For general illnesses, acupuncture and local medical knowledge were employed side by side with modern medicine. Dental care was also available, including the fitting of false teeth.

In normal conditions - no government military siege - whistles signalled reveille at 5.30 a.m. Fifteen minutes were allowed for personal affairs and then everyone joined an exercise session which might last from 15-30 minutes. The morning meal, as full-scale as lunch and dinner, was at 8 a.m. Before the meal there might be a need to transport blocks of wood used as cooking fuel. In the cultivating seasons, after exercises, most people would leave the camp to work in the field or garden before it was too hot. In that case the morning meal was postponed until 9 or 10 a.m. after which work was resumed until around 1 p.m., when lunch was eaten and an afternoon rest followed until it was cool again at about 3.30-4 p.m. They then worked till dusk.

Out of these seasons, which might cover up to six months of the year, people proceeded to work as assigned after the morning meal. The mid-day rest was between 12-1 p.m., but those who had 'light' work in the camp might not have lunch. The afternoon work session ended around 3-4 p.m., followed by sport until 4.30 p.m. The most popular sport was basketball with men's and women's teams. Table tennis and volley-ball were also played in some

camps. After bathing, the evening meal was eaten at 5 p.m. while listening to programmes from the VOPT. Then it was entertainment time with the Thai popular dance called 'ramwong' from about 6-7 p.m. The 'study session' was held between 7-9 p.m., and bed time was at 9.30 p.m. The study session might consist of group study and a discussion on 'revolutionary theory', listening to a summary of the internal and international political situation from the 'news unit', a monthly criticism and self-criticism meeting, or a meeting of the whole camp to discuss and plan cultivation, for example. Whenever possible, CPT men and women worked for seven days and then had a day off when they could do whatever they wanted to - rest, or play basketball from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

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